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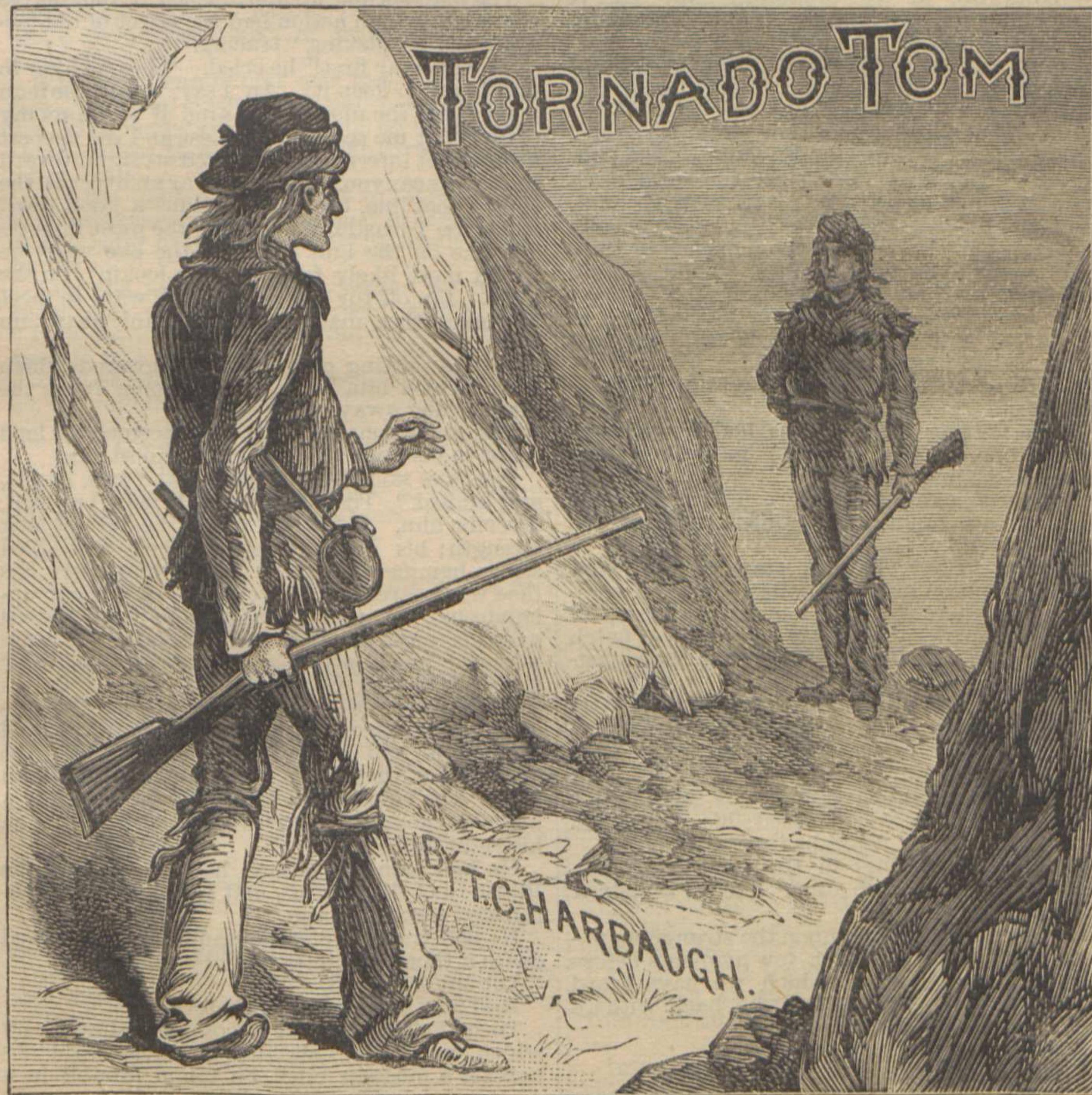
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"WHO MIGHT YOU BE?" ASKED TORNADO TOM, LEANING FORWARD EAGER TO HEAR THE REPLY
WHEN IT CAME CLEAR AND DISTINCT; "INJUN JACK FROM RED CORE!"

Tornado Tom;

OR,

INJUN JACK FROM RED CORE.

A Story of the Unexplored Wilds of Idaho.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,

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ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAP IN THE SAND.

"TORNADO, ar' ye dreamin'? No! Ar' ye goin' blind? Nary a blind! Is this confounded kentry bewitched? That's a conundrum what ye must give up, Tornado. But, let me git down to solid bizness an' bottom facts—yes, cl'ar down to hard-pan, an' the bed-rock ov truth. That thing wasn't thar yesterday, fur I stood right whar I'm standin' now contemplatin' the scenery an' tryin' to get the right bearin's. It didn't come hyar ov its own account, fur maps don't grow in the sand. Somebody made this one—somebody whose bizness in these parts seems to be your bizness. *Your* bizness! Just think ov that, Tornado!"

The eyes of the lonely speaker flashed, and as he started with clinched hands from the spot where he had halted, he cried:

"Woe to the man what makes my bizness hyar his!"

It was getting dark, the sun had disappeared behind one of the gigantic mountains that hemmed the man in.

The scene exhibited nature in her wildness, and he, tall, gaunt and tanned, matched the prospect well.

Strange to say, he was standing on what might have been in an age long gone by, a sand-bar. But where the river had flowed, trees and grass were growing, with here and there a patch of gray sand, whose particles would have glistened in the sun.

This scene was in the midst of that wild part of Idaho which some geographers have called the *terra incognita* of the Far West, and others "the land of death."

The man who called himself by the singular name of Tornado was puzzled; his expression showed this. Now, what had perplexed him?

Simply a lot of lines in the sand at his feet, lines that bisected each other like the streets of a great city.

He had come suddenly upon the strange map—so suddenly, indeed, that a few moments before the ludicrous questions which we have heard him ask himself, he had started back with an exclamation of astonishment.

And his fierce warning words?

What did they mean?

"Woe to the man what makes my business his!"

For many moments the discoverer had stared

at the uncouth tracery without a close examination.

Now he stooped and appeared to study it with increasing interest.

He held in his left hand a long-barreled, dingy-looking rifle whose stock, adorned with the head of a deer in tin, rested on the ground beside an enormous foot, while the fingers of his right hand followed, as if from some irresistible impulse, the little creases in the sand.

"I'd like to carry this 'ar map in my pocket," he said, speaking to himself. "But, as I can't do that, I've got to tote it in my noggin. The man what made it didn't carry it on paper; but drawed it hyar from recollection to refresh his memory. It begins to look as if thar's two men huntin' the same thing in these parts. Great boomin' thunders! What if thar ar'? What if somebody—mebbe more than one—intends to dispute *it* with ye, Tornado?"

The man sprung up and dashed a foot across the sand—which action had the effect of obliterating the perplexing "tracing."

"I war hyar first!" he cried. "I came hyar to find it, an' to keep it! An' I say, woe to the man what made the map in the sand if he hunts my prize! Let me see! The widest and the deepest line on that infernal map pointed straight toward the narrer canyon. An' thar war an arrer on the end ov that line, too! Thet means a good deal; it means, Tornado, that it war the most important line on the hull map, an' the one what he would most likely take if he's lookin' fur the prize. I'm off fur the canyon. I want to meet the fellar that made that map, an' chaw 'im up!"

With a parting glance at the ground which had yielded him such unwholesome fruit, the man sprung away.

Eagerness coupled with rage seemed to lend speed to his ungainly limbs, he almost ran.

We have said that the man was "tall, gaunt, and tanned." These four words briefly, but well, describe him. If tall and gaunt, he did not lack strength; his hands, when clinched, resembled sledge-hammers in more ways than one. His face was beardless and well defined, but not unattractive. A pair of hawk-like eyes peered over his high, sun-scorched cheeks, which were whipped incessantly by crackers of long hair that touched his shoulders.

His garments were the well-known habiliments of mountain-men; they had served him well, and the seams told that he had lately seen "the plains," for they were well laden with alkali dust. The rifle was not his only weapon, for a huge bowie-knife occupied a leathern sheath on his right hip.

He had seen the plains; he had crossed the Bitter Root Mountains, and invaded the death-infested acres of Idaho.

He had traveled one thousand miles and faced death a thousand times to find—what?

Let our story tell.

And now somebody was before him.

Tornado Tom—for let us complete the title by which we shall know this character—did not halt for a moment until he found himself in a narrow mountain pass which he had incorrectly dubbed a canyon.

It was several miles from the startling map,

and on either hand rose the dark and wooded sides of the Unknown Mountains. The man had evidently visited the spot before, for he had called it the narrow canyon.

"Wal, I'm hyar!" he said. "Tornado, what do you think ov the map, now?"

The man had halted in the narrowest portion of the pass, and was wiping his brow with a sweep of his lengthy arm.

If he intended to reply to the self-put question he did not, for a sound and a sight held his tongue.

"I guess I've found the map-maker a'ready," he thought.

Perhaps he had.

At a certain point about twenty feet in his front stood a figure which he would have run against if he had continued on a few more strides.

It looked like a statue cut out of stone and planted there; but Tornado Tom knew that it was a living man, and, of course, his mortal enemy!

While the man-hunter was hastening to the pass, night had thrown her pall over the country. The mountain pass was lit up by the stars alone—lamps that hung too far away to afford much light.

But the light was sufficient to show Tornado that his antagonist was his equal in height, but a little stouter in build, and that he was similarly armed.

"By the jaws ov Jonah's whale! we kin hev it out hyar without interference!" gritted Tom. "He's the man that made the map, an' consequently he's my victim."

Then he raised his voice, but at the same time his hand glided to his thigh.

"Hello! stranger?"

"Hello!" was the gruff response.

"Who might you be?"

Tom was leaning forward eager to hear the reply when it came clear and distinct, a challenge in every word:

"Injun Jack from Red Core!"

The words went up the mountains, and a moment's silence followed.

Tornado had drawn his knife; so had the man from Red Core.

"Ain't ye goin' to trade names?" he asked.

"Sart'ainly! I'm called Tornado whar they know me best."

Tom thought he heard Injun Jack utter a note of surprise.

"Why ar' ye hyar?" asked Tom.

"That's my business."

"It's mine, too! You made the map in the d'rt?"

Injun Jack did start; Tom saw this.

"Yes!" he said.

"Then, I know why you're nyar!" cried Tornado. "We might as well proceed to biz'ness!"

There was no reply, but the next moment the two men, thus strangely met, were advancing toward each other with drawn bowies.

CHAPTER II. QUEEN OF RED CORE.

IT was a wild place for such a combat.

Tornado Tom let his rifle slip to the ground, and braced himself for the duel.

"One ov us ar' bound to go under, mebbe both," he said to himself.

The duelists came together at length, each one about ten feet from his rifle.

Then Tom got a good look at his foe, and knew that he was a man whom he had never seen before.

He was quite an Indian in appearance, so that the name he bore fitted him well. He had a handsome and supple figure, which was clad in a new buckskin suit, and Tornado saw that he was still a young man, though one who had roughed it much. A clean-cut face ornamented by a dark mustache that might have killed a city beau with envy, and eyes that scintillated like the stars overhead. He was about thirty-six, and if there were no Indian blood in his veins, why the dark skin, and the dark hair that lay loosely on his broad shoulders?

Such was Tornado Tom's foe.

The toe of Tom's heavy boot touched Indian Jack's dainty moccasin when they halted.

"Injun Jack, eh?" thought our first acquaintance. "By Jehu! he's a daisy! Ef he war a friend instead ov a foe, gosh! how close he'd stick!"

The men faced each other for several minutes in silence as if they hated to "proceed to business."

Why should they be enemies?

In that wild land why should they not be the stanchest of friends?

At last Injun Jack spoke:

"I'm ready, Tornado."

"I've been waitin' fur ye these five minutes," was the response.

The gladiators threw back their ample chests and raised their bowies. The next instant there was a furious pass followed by a recoil; but they stood together once more foot to foot.

All at once Injun Jack lowered his blade.

"We'd better let *them* go by first," he said, addressing Tornado.

"Confound it!" growled Tom. "This ar' the second time in my life that the p'izen varmints hev interrupted a duel fur me. Ar' they follerin' you, Injun?"

"Guess not; I've been hyar two weeks; but I haven't seen a scalp-lock, yet."

"Two weeks!" ejaculated Tom, opening his eyes, with amazement. "What hev I been doin' all the time thet—"

The sounds that came from the western end of the pass put an end to his sentence, and, by common consent he and Injun Jack stepped aside and hid among the young trees at the foot of the hill.

While they stood there, breathlessly waiting for the Indians, their shoulders touched—the shoulders of these two deadly foes.

"They're on horseback," muttered Tom. "I'm goin' to count 'em jest fur fun."

Presently the leader of the cavalcade came in sight, then another and another in single file, Tom counting them in low whispers as they rode by.

Injun Jack did not appear to notice the night riders. From the corners of his eyes he was inspecting the man at his side.

In the mean while Tornado had counted fifty Indians, and then stopped with an oath.

"It's a hull tribe!" he exclaimed. "Injun, if we wait till the last chap goes by we'll never git to squar' accounts hyar."

"Mebbe not. Let us go up the mountain."

"Agreed."

An instant later the duelists would have glided from the spot if an unforeseen accident had not occurred.

A cry like the call of a night-bird came down the mountain; it passed as it were directly over the heads of the foes.

Instantly the Indians drew rein, and Tom and Jack exchanged glances.

"Them fellars up thar ar' comin' down," announced Tornado. "It looks to me as if we're between the fryin'-pan an' the fire!" an expression containing a good deal of truth.

The red-skins in the pass were waiting for some above to join them.

Retreat was now impossible, and to crouch where they were seemed to be courting death.

Tom was revolving several problems connected with the dilemma in his head, when he felt a hand on his arm.

Turning quickly he looked into Injun Jack's face.

"I have a plan," murmured Jack. "Yonder is the end of this Indian band; the last two horses are ridden by Injun boys—two chaps what ain't a toothful fur you and me. The tribes are bound to find out that we're in this kentry, if they don't know it already. So, what's the difference?"

"Wal, state yer plan."

"It is to creep down thar, knock the little niggers off their hosses an' ride fur life with a hull tribe at our heels."

It was a desperate venture tersely proposed, but uttered in a fearless tone.

"The plan strikes me hard," answered Tom. "I'm ready on one condition."

"Well?"

"Thet we ar' to resume the fight at the first opportunity provided we run the gantlet safely."

"Of course," returned the man from Red Core. "These Injuns hev only interrupted our business, not put an end to it."

"Now for the young pinks ov the mountains."

A minute later the two men were gliding toward the objects of their attention, who occupied the backs of their horses, dreamless of the foe so near.

Suddenly they leaped up like tigers from the grass of the jungle, and the two Indian boys were sent reeling from their perches—their first warning of the nearness of the enemy a stunning blow.

Almost before the victims touched the ground, the two men were on the Indian blankets, and the next instant two horses flew toward the western end of the pass!

"We're in fur it!" cried Tornado as a wild cry that seemed to shake the night rose behind them.

Yes, they were in for it.

The pass was barely wide enough for them to keep side by side.

The entire party of Indians seemed thundering behind them; they made the night hideous with their maddening cries, and now and then

a far-reaching bullet whistled past the white men's heads.

Once out of the pass, a dim country lay before them.

"Keep together! Remember the bizness we've got on hand," reminded Tom as they rode from the unlucky place, then down a little valley they dashed to pause at length on the banks of a swift mountain stream like those that flow through the canyons of the Far West.

Their horses were jaded and almost exhausted, but the chase seemed to be over. At least its sounds no longer reached the ears of the twain.

"I guess we outran them, but it would be best to put the river between us," remarked Injun Jack.

"Ef the hosses kin make it," was the reply.

"We can try them."

Into the stream plunged the two men, to be carried away as if they were mere cockle-shells. But the horses soon got the hang of the current, and struck out boldly for the opposite shore.

"Injun, we've struck the devil's own stream," broke suddenly from Tornado's lip, as his horse, lunging backward, sunk almost out of sight. "Ef these infarnal quicksands get in their work, we'll never fight it out—never!"

There was no reply, but Tom thought he detected a gleam of joy in Injun Jack's eyes.

"Oh, yes, you want the sands to wipe Tornado out!" he thought. "Then you would have it all your own way, an' you could go on makin' maps in the sand, until you find the prize, an' thar'd be nobody to dispute it with you."

The speaker's horse was now struggling valiantly for life between two enemies that seemed eager for his destruction, the water and the hidden quicksands.

Injun Jack watched the battle with no little interest. His own animal was getting on comparatively well.

All at once a cry which the bravest cannot always suppress was mingled with the noise of the waters. Tornado's horse was giving up the battle, and the man from Red Core saw him plunge backward and disappear beneath the waves.

At the same instant Tornado Tom sunk out of sight.

"Gone!" ejaculated Injun Jack. "I'm left alone to hunt the prize. By jingo! he was a man of grit."

But the next moment two human hands shot above the waters, then a head, and the hard face of Tornado was revealed to his foe.

"I can't leave 'im! Better to save 'im an' fight it out fairly than let the water have 'im!"

The last word was followed by a plunge from a horse whose head and back were just visible above the current; Injun Jack had leaped to the rescue of his mortal enemy.

Quick as a flash his right hand shot toward the drowning man, his left still clutched the mane of the Indian horse; and, as Tornado sunk again, the viselike gripe of his foe was at his shoulder.

Then the horse pushed bravely toward the shore, as if he knew that the lives of two brave men depended on his efforts.

He dragged them through the water, but at the edge of the shore he gave up the struggle,

and fell back into the river exhausted and dying.

But he had not failed in his undertaking, for one man dragged another up the grassy slope, and then sunk beside him.

Many minutes passed away when at length Tornado Tom moved, opened his eyes and partly rose.

"Jehu! what a tight rub!" he gasped. "That's what I call knockin' at death's shanty. Hello! Injun?"

The inanimate form of the man from Red Core lay at Tom's feet, and he had just espied it.

But there was no response to the exclamation.

"Mebbe the river got the best ov him," continued Tornado, and then he said as a ray of triumph lit up his eyes: "What ef it did?"

Then he proceeded to shake his enemy with such a result that once more they stood erect and face to face.

They could resume the fight now, and the soft grass of the river-bank was a better place for one to die than the rough mountain pass.

Once more they drew their knives; but all at once Tornado Tom threw his dirk at his feet with a hard border oath.

"Thunder! we're fools, Injun!" he exclaimed. "Arter such a tussle with death we oughtn't to be enemies. Ef it hadn't been for you, Tornado Tom would be in a quicksand coffin. Hyar, what's the use ov bein' lunatics when thar's enough fur both ov us? Put it thar, pard. Shake!"

The brawny hand of Tornado Tom was outstretched to his foe and there was eternal friendship in his eye.

"No, we can't be friends!" was the unexpected response. "What Injun Jack wants you hunt, and he will never divide with any living man—never! Besides, he's not huntin' *it* for himself but for—Olive."

"Olive!" echoed Tom, who had been staring speechless at the speaker, "who in the name ov thunder is Olive?"

A flash of mingled pride and defiance lit up Injun Jack's eyes.

"Olive? She's the Queen of Red Core; hunt her, touch her if you dare!"

And with the last word, which was accompanied by a farewell wave of his hand, Injun Jack turned his back on Tornado and deliberately walked away.

"Wal, I'm squelched ef he isn't a reg'lar daisy!" muttered the bewildered man, gazing after the retreating figure. "So he's huntin' fur Olive, eh? Doesn't want an ounce ov it fur himself. By grammny! I offered him my fist; but he wouldn't take it, preferrin' to be enemy still. Wal, I'm satisfied. Take care, Injun Jack! The next time Tornado Tom offers you his hand thar may be suthin' in it. Queen ov Red Core, eh? Thet's a deuced pretty title fur these parts. I'd like to see her, 'pon my life I would! Mebbe she'd suit Tornado Jr. Pshaw! what am I talkin' about. Queen ov Red Core! By Jehu! I'm goin' to see the animile."

CHAPTER III.

TORNADO JR.

"WHY doesn't he come back? He said he wouldn't be gone more than half an hour; he

promised faithfully to return within that time or I should have insisted on going with him. What drives him hither and thither, anyhow? That's what I'd like to know. Why, only yesterday I caught him making lines on the ground with his ramrod. He's hunting something. A gold mine? That's what I think sometimes; but he made me swear that I would never seek to know his business in this wild land. What a foolish oath that was! and how nearly have I broken it a thousand times! Well, come or not, old fellow, I'm not going to wait any longer, for here's one fellow who is going to sleep."

These words fell from the lips of a boy who stood at the mouth of a mountain cave.

It was a balmy night in midsummer; but the air was bracing, and the stars that glittered in a clear sky showed him his surroundings—mountains!

He was a handsome lad of seventeen, well built and supple, and the clear blue eyes that he possessed held imprisoned a ray of good-humor.

But how came he there?

We shall see presently.

Having proclaimed his intention of seeking sleep, he went into the cave, dropping over the aperture a network of mountain vines which his hand had raised.

If he slept, however, the nap was one of brief duration, for an hour later he reappeared in the starlight, this time armed with a rifle and two revolvers.

There was an expression of anxiety and impatience visible on his face.

"Something unusual has happened to Tornado. I am sure of it!" exclaimed the boy. "He left me at dusk; it must be midnight now. I will go as far as the winding pass and look for him."

Shouldering the rifle, the youth started off at an agile gait, eager to reach the spot mentioned.

He had visited it before, for he seemed to know the way he took, and did not have to stop to take his bearings like travelers in doubt.

"Here I am, but no Tornado!" fell from his lips as he halted before one of those mountain ravines gloomy enough at noonday, but ten-fold more repulsive at night. "It's darker than a bear's den. Tornado, old fellow, where are you, anyhow?"

At that moment the gold-hunter and his enemy, Injun Jack were leagues away standing face to face with bowie-knives in their hands.

The only answer vouchsafed the boy's question was the echo of his own words at which at any other time he might have laughed, but now—

"Then stay away until you're ready to come back!" he said, sputteringly. "I don't know why I followed you to this country. You did do me a good turn in Omaha, Tornado—you took me away from those men who were going to make a professional gymnast out of me, and I tried to pay you back by nursing you when you were laid up by Lucky Ben's bowie. Somehow or other, we just drifted together, and when you wanted to come out here after something, I know not what, and asked me if I'd come, too,

bless me if I could say 'no.' So I'm here, but where are you, Tornado?"

Did that stone which had rolled down the mountain side to fall at the boy's feet answer him?

At any rate he started and looked up with a half-suppressed cry.

Something had started that stone—something that lived.

The youth saw it as his eyes told, and backing from the spot he cocked his rifle.

"Steady," he whispered, self-encouragingly. "It is your first red-skin, Tornado Jr., and maybe you can show the old fellow a scalp when he comes back."

The boy's keen eyes did not deceive him. Thanks to the stone, his life had been saved, for that Indian had just been crawling tiger-like upon him.

Another instant and a dead boy would have been waiting for Tornado Tom at the winding pass.

The Indian rose as he saw Tornado Jr. moving away, but, quick as a flash, the boy's rifle leaped to his shoulder.

"Halt! Another step and there'll be a vacant chair in your parlor," cried the youth.

If the savage understood he did not obey, for the next moment the boy saw fit to send a bullet crashing through his head!

A wild cry and a heavy thud followed the death-shot, and the young marksman, as if startled by the fatality of his aim, turned and fled.

"I'm a fool for running. Tornado would laugh at me!" he muttered, halting, but not until he had put several hundred yards between him and his first Indian. "I wonder if anybody else ever run from a dead man? Pshaw! no! The scalp belongs to me. I'll go back and get it. Tornado once showed me how they take them off."

Inclined to laugh at his folly, Tornado Jr. was about to return for the scalp-lock of his foe when he was startled by the whinny of a horse. Almost immediately afterward the guttural words of some Indian language fell upon his ears.

He had halted at the end of a canyon, and all at once, from the darkness that ensnrouded it, came a horse and his rider.

Tornado Jr. seemed suddenly rooted to the spot, and for several seconds he did nothing but stare at the scene before him.

This was nothing more or less than an Indian on horseback—one of the red centaurs of the wild West.

The boy's rifle was not loaded; his hasty flight from his first battle-field had kept the trusty weapon empty. But he had twelve loads in the pistols in his belt.

Did he use them?

No.

The same strange impulse that had already asserted its power got control of him again, and the hero who had run from a dead Indian now showed his heels to a live one.

Over the ground as fast as his limbs could carry him went the little coward; but thundering behind him came the mounted Indian, followed by at least forty more.

Such a chase could not last long. Tornado Jr. was pursued to the center of a treeless patch of ground, where, like a wolf at bay, he shut his teeth hard and whirled on his pursuers, a revolver in each hand.

On came the Indians, close together. When they caught sight of their antagonist a yell of triumph sought the stars, and all at once rein was drawn before him.

"White boy run well," said the burly half-naked leader of the fiends. "Him got good legs. Now him surrender."

"To you? I guess not!" was the answer, and the next second the revolver in his right hand spoke, and the chief pitched heavily over his horse's head!

Then the left hand of the defiant boy went up, and from the death-charged chambers of the pistols a volley was poured into the faces of the Indians.

Startled, staggered by such courage the savages fell back in confusion, and Tornado Jr. with a coolness which his recent flight did not warrant improved the breathing time by slipping new cartridges into the revolvers.

"What! are the rascals going to run?" he said to himself. "Oh, my red pigeons, I have plenty more leaden compliments left!"

The infuriated red-skins were not going to fly from a boy of seventeen. Tornado Jr. did not know them if he thought so.

They advanced again, this time to end the conflict, but again the rain of death beat against their bodies.

But this could not last always.

One of the revolvers snapped. He tried it again and again, but with the same result.

With a mad cry the boy threw it away, and a moment later the other one was useless also, because it was empty.

"I made a good fight anyhow!" he gritted.

"Now, redadies, come and take me."

The foe did not need such an invitation; they were already upon him, and their eager hands were reaching after him when—

Bang! bang! sounded a repeating-rifle on the side of the nearest hill and a voice called out:

"Run for your life, gallant boy. I'll do all I can for you. Run!"

Tornado Jr. seemed to have confidence in the unseen speaker, and springing from the very hands of the Indians as it seemed he ran with all his might.

And as he ran he seemed to hear the new voice still.

He would have wagered his very life that his helper was a young girl.

But who could it be?

Since crossing the Bitter Root Mountains, he had seen but one white face—Tornado Tom's.

"But, never mind," thought the boy. "I'll discover who has helped me to-night."

CHAPTER IV.

TRACKED HOME.

WHEN he found himself among the trees again, Tornado Jr. stopped and turned his face toward the spot from whence the bullets of his preserver had come.

To all outward appearance the Indians had

ceased to pursue, and he resolved to ascertain the identity of his unknown helper.

"It was a girl's voice, I am sure of that. But who can she be? Tornado says that we are the only white folks here. I have believed that; but now I hardly know what to think."

Thus thought the boy as he hastened up the hill on whose side his helper had stood.

He was full of eager curiosity which lent speed to his movements, and at last he stood where he thought his preserver had been.

But no girlish figure caught his eye; no pretty face, such as he had pictured to his mind.

He did not dare to call her, for the Indians might still be in hearing; he was obliged to content himself with a still hunt. This he did in no good humor and without results.

"I can't waste the whole night here," he said, at last. "I will find her some time. As she has rendered me the most important of services this country is not too great to lose her from me. I will go back to the cave and when Tornado comes I'll astonish him. Ah! how the old fellow will open his eyes and listen. A white girl in these parts? It seems a dream to me; but it is no dream."

Tornado Jr. turned away, and just as the first streaks of dawn were illuminating the earth, he entered the mountain cave again.

To his utter surprise he found it untenanted; there were no signs that told of Tom's return.

"Not back yet? Something disastrous has happened. If I only knew where to look for my old pard! Ah! that accursed secret that brought him hither. I wish it had never had an existence."

Not knowing where to look for his friend, the boy could do nothing but wait, so throwing himself wearily down on a cot of buffalo-hides he resolved to wait and rest.

But he could not keep slumber from his eyelids, and he was soon fast asleep.

Where was Tornado Tom?

We left him on the grassy bank of the unknown river where he had offered his tawny hand in friendship to Injun Jack—an offer which that worthy had refused with scorn.

They were to be enemies still and Tom cursed himself for what he termed his folly when he saw the strange man walking away.

"Touch the Queen of Red Core if you dare! That's what he said, er words to that effect," growled Tom. "Wal, mebbe I don't want to touch her; but I'm goin' to see her anyhow."

Did Injun Jack know that he was followed?

The gaunt figure that kept persistently in his wake like a bloodhound was Tornado Tom's. At times the trailer lost sight of his man; but stuck to the trail as if by scent, and found himself on it still when the day broke.

"He's goin' straight to Red Core now," muttered Tornado, as the trail led him abruptly to the left. "Did he think that I would go back without tryin' to find something out arter he had more than hinted of a gal in these parts an' in his keer? Injun, you don't know me yet."

The old fellow did not pause until he saw the handsome figure of Injun Jack standing in bold outline against the sky on the bare summit of a hill.

"The tiger ar' nigh the den," he muttered in

great glee. "He is lookin' to see ef the coast ar' cl'ar. Now he dashes fur Red Core!"

The figure on the hill had suddenly dropped out of sight; but Tornado saw it push downward and enter a little valley well timbered and covered with rich green grass.

"Thar's Red Core!" fell suddenly from the trailer's lips. "Now whar's the Queen ov it?"

Was that little log-built shanty that graced the center of the valley the place which Injun Jack had proudly called Red Core? Tom was certain of it, and yet he could not tell why.

But all at once his opinion was confirmed, for he saw a young girl spring from the cabin, and hasten toward the strange man—his foe.

The features of Injun Jack brightened when he noticed her, and the next moment he held her wrists in his hands, and was looking down into her eyes.

"She's a beauty, this Red Core gal!" ejaculated Tom in his place of concealment. "Jehu! what a mate she'd make for Tornado Jr. But they mustn't come together, for Injun an' me ar' enemies. Tornado Jr. kin find a wife in the States jest as purty as that gal, when he goes back with the rocks."

Tom had not overjudged the girl who stood before Injun Jack.

She was a lovely creature—a girl whose face and figure did not possess a single fault. Her head, rich in luxuriant golden hair, would not have touched Injun Jack's shoulders, therefore, he could look down into her eyes. She might have been seventeen; surely she had not passed that year.

For several moments the man from Red Core contemplated the girl before him, and was about to lead her back to the cabin, when, at a touch of his sleeve on her hand, she started back with a light cry.

"Where have you been?" she asked, her large eyes swimming in astonishment.

"Oh," he laughed, "I swam a river."

"Not for pleasure?"

"Why not, Olive? The rivers in this country are not wide—"

"But you tell me that they are the abodes of deadly quicksands. Jack, do not try to deceive me. You have been chased. There are Indians in this country. I know it because I have seen them."

"You? What! have you seen Injuns, Olive? Where have you been?"

The face of the girl grew crimson.

"Ah! did you not promise me that you would not leave Red Core during my absence?" he said, reprovingly. "You have broken that promise to the detriment, mebbe, of all my plans. Now, what did you see?"

The girl hesitated, and the grip of Injun Jack on her wrists tightened until all color left her face. His eyes were flashing like the eyes of an offended master.

"Tell me, Olive! What cou'd you see in these parts that you must conceal from Injun Jack? You saw something besides Injuns? Ha! is that not so?"

The Queen of Red Core hung her head.

"Look up here!" he cried. "Tell me the truth. It will be the best for both of us."

After awhile the girl raised her head, and

after trying in vain to avoid his searching gaze, she told the story of Tornado Jr.'s rescue from the Indians.

The croucher not far away heard every word and noticed every action.

"So they met each other! Confound it! They'll git to makin' love to one another an' spile all my plans. Not if I kin help it! That's the talk. By the jumpin' jingo! I'll stan' between the two young fools, an' keep 'em apart with my old arms. I didn't think that the Red Core gal was such a beauty. I wish she war so newhar around the north pole, instead ov hyar, interferin' with my plans."

Meanwhile, Olive was finishing her narration to Injun Jack, and when she concluded she stepped back, for Jack had dropped her hands and she was free.

"So thar ar' two of them!" said the man from Red Core. "Thar may be a whole camp-full somewhere. How old was the boy?"

"I do not know. I saw him but indistinctly. He was large enough to be seventeen, or thereabout."

"Just old enough for you, Olive, eh?" said Jack, with a forced smile.

The girl did not reply; her blue eyes dropped.

"Listen to me, Queen Olive. When we have found the big bonanza you will have plenty of time to hunt up a lover. But now you must not think of one. That boy is not here alone. I know this. I saw the man who brought him hither. He is my enemy. Why? Because we possess the same secret. That boy is my bitter enemy, and yours, too. He is trying to deprive you of that immense fortune that will be yours if you obey Injun Jack. I wish you had not left the cabin for one moment last night."

"Jack! If I had not—"

"Yes, I know! The Injuns would have got away with the boy. They would have put one thorn out of our path. The big haul shall be yours, Olive, every ounce of it! If you'll stick by me you shall find that Injun Jack will do to tie to. I saw that boy's master last night, an' told him to touch the Queen of Red Core if he dares. I would say the same to that boy if he was hyar. You must not meet him. I swear you must not—I, Injun Jack! Nothing must keep us from going straight to the mine of gold. No love-making, no deception of any kind. Injun Jack never missed a mark yet. Olive, if you do not listen to me—if I catch you with that boy I will not hesitate—"

He seized her wrists again, and drawing her to him hissed into her ears the rest of the sentence. "I will not hesitate to kill!"

In vain the girl's face grew pallid, and she tried to break from his grasp.

"Jack—Jack, let me go back to the cabin!" she cried.

"Yes, go back to Red Core, and remember!" he said, releasing her, "I am Injun Jack, and if you act sensibly you shall be the richest girl on this continent; but if you get that boy or anybody else into your head, I'll go cl'ar back on you. Do you hear me? Cl'ar back!"

"That's bizness! Keep 'em apart! I'm with you thar, Injun," murmured Tornado Tom. "But touch the boy if you dare!"

CHAPTER V.

OLD TORNADO MAKES A COMPACT.

"I'll not let on that I know anything about little Tornado's adventure last night, jist fur the sake ov seein' ef he'll tell me," decided Tom as he turned his back on the cabin in the valley. "We must keep 'em apart, Injun Jack. Thar's su'thin' better in the States fur the boy—yes, su'thin' better than the Queen ov Red Core."

Tornado Tom was eager to reach the mountain cave, for he hurried over the ground at a rapid pace.

He had lost his rifle in the river which had almost turned out to be his grave, but his revolvers were still safe, and his cartridges in prime condition.

"Things work queerly sometimes. Ef Injun Jack hedn't left that map in the sand, I wouldn't hav found out that he war in these parts, huntin' fur the same thing I'm interested in. I wonder ef Old Icicle told him? No! he didn't, fur one hour after the old man whispered the secret in my ear, didn't I plant 'im? An' didn't he swear that I war the only man what he had told it to? Old Icicle war a queer one; he didn't say much, but when he did open his mouth he told the truth; you could bet on that!"

The rough man was communing thus with himself when he happened to raise his eyes, to cut his sentence short, and to start back with a "hello!" of surprise.

Right before him stood seven horses, and on the back of each was an Indian.

The faces of the red-skins expressed no little merriment, for they had been watching the unsuspecting gold-hunter with much amusement. He had been walking directly toward them for several minutes, and they knew that he was completely in their power.

"Wal, I swear!" ejaculated Old Tornado as he halted. "Hyar's a nice pickle."

"Hello! white man!" interrupted one of the Indians in fair English. "Pale-face run ag'in' Injun if he no stop. Where him keep him eyes?"

"They're in my head now!" was the answer, and with the last word the savages found the tables completely turned on them, for the gold-hunter was covering them with the two revolvers, one in each hand.

"I allus war handy with the sixes!" warned Tornado, with a sardonic grin. "Now jest undertake to touch a weepin', an' see how quick I'll give ye a passport to kingdom come! Thar's seven ov ye; but thar's thirteen ov me, six deaths in each weepin' an' the concentrated essence ov destruction behind 'em. Git off them hosses!"

The Indians stared into each others' faces, and then glanced at the man.

"Git off them hosses!"

Sullenly the seven stalwart braves obeyed.

"Come out from 'em. I want a cl'ar view ov yer anatomy. Thar! that's right."

The horses relieved of their riders began to move off much to the discomfort of the red-skins.

"Look at me, not at the hosses!" commanded Tornado.

The deadly pistols forced attention, and Tornado saw the Indians standing before him with flashing eyes and heaving breasts.

"Throw down yer rifles?"

Seven rifles were cast upon the ground.

"Now listen to me. I didn't come to this kentry to disturb a single Injun in his rights. I simply come to hunt up a piece ov land with a hole in it, an' when I find it I will go back without the blood ov one ov yer race on my skeerts. All I ask is fair play. If you try to balk me, you'll think that all the bolts ov death hev been turned on ye. We ought to understand each other. I want to find that piece ov ground without a single scrimmage with you; but, I'm goin' to find it ef I hev to go on a reg'lar war-path. I've got opposition already, but it isn't Injun. All I ask is squar' dealin', an' only one Jack in the deck. Now let me hear from you."

His words were addressed to the Indian who had first spoken, and that scarlet worthy after a covert glance full of meaning at his companions, addressed the gold hunter.

"White man hunt gold-mine long lost, eh?"

"That's it. Who told you that it has been lost a long time?"

"Never mind. Injun knows. If him find it him leave country, and never come back?"

"Never!" answered Tornado Tom. "Ef you hev 'squires in these parts I'll go before the hull batch ov 'em an' subscribe to ten million oaths. Do you know whar it is?"

"Injun knows."

"Don't cod me. I kin tell when a fellow is lyin' by his eyes. Don't forget that my fingers touch the triggers."

"Injun see. What him lie fur?"

"Thet's so. Now, whar is the mine?"

"If white man go with Injun he will know."

"Go with you?" and the words were followed by a long whistle. "Do you see anything green in Old Tornado's eyes? Not fur Joe, thank ye, gentlemen. Not fur Joseph."

The answer seemed to disconcert the Indian.

"What would make white man b'lieve?" asked the red-skin.

"Nothin'! You don't know anything about it."

"May Injun show?"

"Ef you kin—yes."

The next moment the savage drew his knife and stepped from the line.

The ground before him was quite bare and hard beside. Stooping for a moment, he cut a number of gashes into the earth with the blade and rose with a ray of victory in his eyes.

As for Tornado he was simply astonished, and stared at the marks in the earth as if they were diamonds just dropped from the skies.

"It's a map like Injun Jack made in the sand!" he ejaculated. "The red-skin is not lyin'. He knows whar the big bonanza is!"

Slowly, and with no signs of excitement in his eyes, Tornado looked at the triumphant Indian.

"I'm not satisfied. Them marks may mean nothin'," he said. "They look like a fish-net to me."

"All would be clear to white man if he would let Injun guide him," was the response.

Tornado did not whistle this time, but merely said:

"The same old proposition. How far away is it?"

"Not far. White man ride Injun horse."

"By Jehu! I'll risk it. 'Nothin' risked, nothin' gained,' as they say in the States. I've lived long enough to know that some Injuns kin be trusted. I caught a lot ov Bannocks in this very way once, made a compact with 'em, an' they stuck to it. I'll try these fellers anyhow."

Then he addressed the leader of the Indians.

"Sw'ar to play fair," he said. "Sw'ar to show me the gold mine er the trail that leads to it, an' Tornado Tom will faithfully carry out his part ov the agreement."

With more than victory in his eyes the Indian whirled upon the six braves.

"Swear to be faithful to the white man. Spotted Robe will kill the first Indian who attempts to betray him."

Then an Indian oath, so well known to the gaunt gold-hunter, fell upon his ears, and he went forw' rd.

An instant later he found himself in the midst of the Indians, his pistols again in his belt, and triumph in his eyes.

"At the first sign ov treachery I'll introduce daylight to more'n one Injun brain!" thought Tornado.

A few minutes after the making of this singular compact between red and white the seven horses moved away, and on one sat a white man.

This individual was Tornado Tom, and the Indian who walked at his horse's head was Spotted Robe.

The journey led the party through several deep-cut canyons, which Tom had not discovered in any of his explorations, and he gazed around him in a great deal of wonderment.

Suddenly an exclamation fell from his lips.

"By Jove! thar's the little mountain what Old Icicle said looked as if the summit had been split with an ax!" he said. "The red-skin warn't lyin' arter all, but I've never been in this part o' the kentry. By the jumpin' jingo! Tornado, ye'r' in luck."

Spotted Robe, who noticed the gratified expression on Tom's face, allowed a similar one to clothe his own, and the next moment he turned upon the hunter, as, at a sign from him, the band drew rein.

"White man must have his eyes hid till Spotted Robe wants them to see," said the Indian.

Tornado winced at the words. "It's a queer idee," he said; "but I'll submit, but I want to remark jest hyer that my weepins hev eyes, ef I can't see. So remember yer oath."

A minute later a piece of an Indian blanket was passed over the gold-hunter's eyes, and the horses resumed the journey.

"We're under ground now. I kin tell by the air," thought Tom. "What ef I'm in the big boss mine? Ah! Injun Jack, the Queen of Red Core will never git an ounce ov the rocks; but the boy—ah! Tornado Jr., we'll be the money kings ov the States this fall."

All at once his meditations were cut short by the sharp blow of an Indian-whip accompanied by the cry used to frighten horses, and his own animal darted forward with a snort of pain.

"Treachery!" flashed through Tornado's mind. "Cuss the o'nerly skunks! Halt! you mad hoss. I'll pay em fur this joke. I'll turn this old hole

in the ground into a graveyard. Jest let me get this rag off—”

He finished the sentence with a yell of horror, for his horse, blindfolded like himself, though he knew it not, had left the solid earth, and was falling through space to death.

This terrible journey seemed endless to the bewildered man, although it did not last three seconds, when crash! thud! and Tornado fell from the horse, suddenly bereft of his senses.

He had been betrayed, and if he should ever recover he would realize the shallowness of Indian oaths.

The echoes awakened by that terrible descent had died away long before there was any movement on the part of either the horse or his rider.

“Tornado, you’re a fool! an unedicated idiot!” suddenly resounded throughout the darkness. “Trust an Injun, an’ unearth a liar! Wal,” after a long pause, “you’re ahead o’ Injun Jack, anyhow. Him an’ the Queen ov Red Core ar’ countin’ the gold afore they’ve found it, but you’ve struck the bonanza, Tom, you’re on the premises. Whar’s the hoss?”

Groping through the gloom, he found the Indian steed—dead!

His own escape was miraculous; but he did not think of that.

He turned to the right and walked forward. Suddenly he brought up against a hard wall. Then wheeling to the left, he tried that direction.

The same result—a wall again!

For half an hour Tornado Tom inspected his prison with his hands.

“I’m like the bottom oyster in the can,” said he, desisting at last. “The can is open at the top, but whar’s the oyster what ever got out by crawlin’ up to it? If I git outen this I b’lieve I’ll quit lookin’ fur the boss bonanza, an’ go to huntin’ seven Injuns whose faces I hev photographed on my mind. But kin I git out? Tornado, you must!”

CHAPTER VI.

BETWEEN PISTOL AND OATH.

TORNADO JR. was more than startled when he returned to the cave after his thrilling adventure with the mounted Indian, and he saw no evidences of Tom’s return.

A strange feeling began to take possession of his heart.

Had Tom encountered those same Indians and fallen before them? The idea was plausible, and the boy gave it credence as he thought.

Then he was left alone in the unknown land.

“I have one friend at least here,” he said at length encouragingly to himself, “and that is the person—the young girl—who saved my life last night. She cannot be here alone, and her companions, who must be white, as I am convinced she is, will also be my friends. I am alone now. Tornado would have returned last night if alive. Now I will try to find my other friend.”

But the youth did not leave the cave without pinning a notice to the wall in a place where it would be certain to attract Tom’s eye if he should come back.

The paper said that he—Tornado Jr.—would

return on the following day, and requested the gaunt gold-hunter to meet him at the cave.

Then shouldering a rifle and armed again with two revolvers, the boy set out to find his preserver of the night before.

He had waited all day for his lost companion, and now the sun was going down again.

In a land so wild to the little *protege*, he could scarcely know whither he was going, but some strange fatality was leading him to a spot where a danger as stern as the one from which he had lately escaped should confront him.

All at once Tornado Jr. came to a sudden halt, for a rough miner’s cabin stood before him. The sight was most unexpected, and an exclamation fell from his lips as he stopped.

“A cabin here?” he said. “It must be the girl’s home.”

The next moment, as if to answer his question, a girlish figure emerged from the hut, and Tornado Jr. almost sprung forward with a cry of joy.

“It is the girl who saved me last night!” he said. “We will be friends, and her friends will be mine also. This is the very discovery I wanted to make. Ah! Tom, I will have a new friend to introduce to you if you ever come back.”

“So your pard hasn’t got back yet?”

Tornado Jr. whirled upon the speaker as if struck in the side with an arrow.

“I left ‘im in good health, but bad humor. Mebbe the Injuns wiped ‘im out.”

The boy had not addressed the man into whose face he was staring.

“That’s right, boy. Take a good look at Injun Jack.”

“Is that your name?”

“That’s my handle.”

“And that cabin—”

“That’s Red Core,” was the interruption. “Never saw it afore, I see.”

“Never.”

“And the Queen—the girl, I mean—”

“Last night—”

“Never mind last night! You are well enough acquainted with her. Right about face!”

Tornado Jr. did not move. Down in the beautiful little valley and in the last rays of the sun stood the girl to whom he owed his life. But before him and between him and the solitary cabin, statue-like, stood Injun Jack, a revolver in his tawny right hand.

“She saved my life last night. You will certainly let me go down and thank her.”

“No!”

The cruel syllable nonplussed the boy.

Who was this strange man who guarded the girl? Was he her father? No! he was too young for that. Her lover, maybe.

The boy felt a blush suffuse his cheeks at the last idea.

“What right have you to refuse to let me thank her for what she did last night?” Tornado Jr. suddenly cried, as his bright eyes flashed with indignation.

“Because I kin!” was the answer. “See here. I’m master wherever I go, an’ here I’m cock o’ the walk. You’re a good way from home, boy, an’ if you interfere in Injun Jack’s affairs there

will soon be ten toes turned skyward in one o' these valleys. So be keerful. Take my advice an' git out o' this kentry. Your pard has met with an accident."

"You have killed him!" flashed the boy stepping boldly toward the revolver on whose trigger Injun Jack's finger rested.

"Well, what if I have?"

"I will avenge him! He was my friend, and you shall pay dearly for shedding his blood."

Injun Jack smiled derisively. "Look here. I don't mind a cur-dog so long as he keeps his distance, but when he snaps at my heels I turn at once and kill 'im! So remember. You're not a handful for me. Right about face!"

Tornado Jr. shut his lips, and shot the man a look of defiance that would have irritated the most patient.

The next moment without a word of warning Injun Jack sprung upon him, and the youth found himself fairly lifted from the ground.

"I'll make you remember that I am Injun Jack!" was hissed in his ear. "I see what a meetin' with the Queen of Red Core would result in, an' by Jove! I will not allow it."

During this speech he was dragging Tornado Jr. from the spot where they had met, and when he stopped the cabin in the valley was no longer to be seen, and the pair stood at the foot of a great hill.

"Boy, you must choose between two things, the revolver or an oath," said Injun Jack, and the youth shrank with a shudder from the muzzle of a weapon that almost touched his face.

"What is your oath?" he asked.

"Swear never to hunt for the girl again—never to speak to her—and never to attempt to save her should you find her in danger."

Every word went to the heart of Tornado Jr. like the successive blows of a dagger.

"What if I should refuse to take the oath?"

"Then this!—here—now!"

Did the pistol creep nearer to his forehead? He thought so.

"You have no mercy and no heart, Injun Jack. If I should find the girl among the quick-sands of some mad river, or among wild Indians where death threatened her—"

"You must not save her. Rather than have you save her, I'd go down there an' prevent that. Now, no more palaverin'. Take your choice!"

What did the boy do?

The next minute he was hurled away by the iron arm of Injun Jack, and these words roared in his ears:

"Keep your oath an' live! Break it an' die!"

As he hastened from the spot where all his plans had failed, his brain seemed to reel, and looking back he saw Injun Jack standing like an ill-omened statue in the twilight.

He did not recover until he found himself standing on the bank of a little stream which had an unfamiliar look, although he knew that it could not be far from the cave home.

Now he did feel utterly alone in the wild country to which Tornado Tom had brought him, and as he sunk upon the ground a wail of despair welled from his throat.

"What is the use of giving up?" he suddenly cried. "My chances to find it are as good as

Tom's were. What mean those strange lines that Tornado traced on the wall of the cave last week? What can they be but a guide to the lost gold-mine that I am sure he is hunting? Why should I not hunt it too, and go back to Omaha a young bonanza prince? I will hunt it, and what is more, I will find it! Cheer up, Tornado Jr. The oath does not prevent you from looking for that hidden wealth which drew old Tom to this country. Back to the cave now for a study of the map."

Renewed vigor seemed to have taken possession of the boy, and the next moment he was leaving the strange stream behind in his eagerness to gain the cave.

Twilight gave way to night as he advanced, and when he struck a valley which looked familiar he quickened his gait until he ran.

"Here I am once more!" fell from his lips as he entered the cave. "Now the first thing is the map."

A few seconds later with the aid of some lucifers he partly illuminated the underground retreat, but all at once a cry of surprise fell from his lips.

"Who has been here?" he ejaculated, for the strange map which he had seen on the wall since Tom's departure had been obliterated and that by the repeated blows of a hatchet!

For several moments Tornado Jr. stared at the scene unable to speak.

All at once the matches went out, and at the same moment a wild cry fell upon the boy's ears. Startled by the noise he dropped the dead matches on the floor of the cave and darted to the opening.

Pushing the vines aside he halted there, and obtained a good view of the moonlit scene that lay below.

What did he see?

Not fifty yards away a stalwart Indian appeared in a half-stooping position holding back two huge, impatient, panther-like brutes.

What could it mean?

Tornado Jr. held his breath, and the next minute the beasts released darted away like bloodhounds, and the Indian sprung erect and clapped his hands with savage delight.

Instinctively the bewildered boy turned his head to watch the dogs; but they had already disappeared.

But a moment later from a part of the landscape that he could not penetrate came two pistol-shots and the sounds of a fierce struggle between man and beast.

At the same time the Indian who had slipped the animals turned and came toward the cave!

CHAPTER VII.

A FORCED INITIATION.

THE Indian came straight toward the cave watched by the astonished boy, who had crouched at the foot of the wall with one of his revolvers drawn.

Tornado Jr. never took his eyes from the red-skin. He thought he had seen the Indian before; the events of the last night were still vivid ones in his brain, and although he could not distinguish his assailants very well he was confident that this one had been one of them.

But all at once the savage turned abruptly

aside, and leaving the cave and the young watcher to the left quickened his gait and went over a knoll.

"I can't afford to lose sight of that mystery yet," murmured the boy, leaving his post. "Everything that has occurred to-night has a bearing on the lost gold-mine, therefore it behooves me to follow this adventure to the end."

And he followed the Indian.

With his finger at the trigger of a trusty pistol Tornado Jr. kept in the wake of the Indian, and saw his dark body after he had passed over the knoll. As if conscious that he was not followed the Indian led the boy to the little river on whose bank he had lately sunk despairing, and without ceremony plunged into the flood.

Tornado Jr. remained on the bank rooted to the spot as if by astonishment. He had not looked forward to such a tame ending of the adventure that had promised so much excitement at the start, and he caught himself staring at the dark body of the Indian now and then seen on the crest of the silvery waves.

He thought that he saw the swimmer land on the opposite bank; but this was mere imagination, and he suddenly turned, chagrined, toward the cave again.

He had been absent an hour from the spot, and after visiting the retreat for the purpose of securing his rifle he had resolved to seek out the spot where the Indian's dogs and their human foes had fought.

But when he reached the mouth of the cave his hand fell suddenly from the vines which it had touched, and he drew back in surprise.

There was a light in the interior of the retreat!

"Maybe old Tornado has come back at last," exclaimed the boy, collecting his scattered senses. "But I will go in cautiously anyhow."

Then he re-approached the aperture, lifted the network of vines and crept in.

Along one of the walls there was a continuous shadow, and Tornado Jr. selected it as a shield.

"No, it is not Tornado Tom," suddenly went through his mind as he halted. "A band of men have taken possession of the cave. More hunters of the mine of gold, I'll bet my head."

Voices rough and sonorous had told the young adventurer that a number of people now tenanted the cave, and he had halted against the rock of passage, his loudly thumping heart in his throat.

Suddenly the rough raising of the vines made him turn his head toward the opening; but all was dark and he saw nothing.

There were footsteps in the gloomy corridor, and all at once a harsh oath rung in his ears as a hand like the talons of an eagle swooped down upon him.

"I'd like to see a mouse escape old Cat-eye even at night!" said little Tornado's captor. "By jingo! hyar's a prize fur the Brotherhood. An' a boy, too, 'pon my heart! Hyar, giv' me that weepin', Daisy. I've see'd sich things go off in the hands ov a boy."

Tornado Jr. did not try to retain the revolver which the hand of the ruffian had taken. Indeed, it seemed ready to drop from his nerveless fingers, and he parted from it very quietly.

A moment afterward the youth felt himself dragged toward the light, and when it was strong enough he looked up into the face of his captor.

Another mystery!

Instead of a face the boy confronted a long gray mask, or in other words a real hangman's cap, with the exception that it contained two eye-holes!

Tornado Jr. was amazed at this discovery, but his reflections were brought to a speedy termination, for he found himself standing in the midst of a circle of such masks, and that in the very cave where Tornado Tom and himself had lately established their headquarters.

"Where did our brother find the listener?" said the voice of one of the Brotherhood.

"He was in the passage crouched ag'in' the wall an' listenin'," was the reply which came from the mask who had captured our hero.

"Brethren of the Gold League, what is the penalty for listening to our deliberations?"

"Death!"

The solemn answer fell from twelve tongues, and Tornado Jr. started back as if a scorpion had shot from the ground and hissed at his feet.

"You are sure he was listening, brother?"

"He war! I ketched 'im in the very act. Ask 'im."

The youth saw the dark eyes of the leader of the Gold League fix themselves upon him. There was not much pity in them at least; what expression was on the face he did not know, for he could not see it.

"You have been caught within hearing distance of a council of the Gold League," said the chief. "What did you hear?"

Tornado Jr. started forward with hope fluttering at the bottom of his heart.

Maybe a defense would save him.

"I heard nothing for I was not listening," he said. "I know no more at this moment about your council than I knew a year ago."

"You were near enough to hear, yet heard nothing! Come, come, boy, the truth!"

"I have told the truth."

A moment's silence followed. "Brethren, the proof is not quite clear against the culprit," declared the chief. "He may not have heard, but yet we must suspect. Our order is founded on justice, and one of our laws is that our prisoners must have the benefit of the doubt."

The heart of Tornado Jr. leaped for joy.

But the next moment his face grew pale again.

"The boy must take the oath. As it does not seem exact justice to visit the death penalty upon him we must secure ourselves nevertheless. Brother Salvo, the iron!"

A cold chill crept to our hero's heart.

"No! no! do not bind me by an oath. I have one to keep already—one taken last night."

The League exchanged mystified glances.

"I will keep this scene sacred without an oath," continued the boy. "I do not want to become a member of your order."

"You must, or die!"

Tornado who had started toward the chief of the Gold League stopped and stood stock still.

"The oath, then, I am ready!" he said.

But away down in his heart he thought: "An oath forced from one by such men as these can not be considered binding."

Then he noticed that the mask called Salvo was kneeling before the fire that burned on the floor of the cave, and that he was manipulating a little iron rod which he had thrust among the coals.

"Prepare the candidate!" suddenly said the chief, pointing to Tornado Jr., and almost before he could realize anything, he stood in the midst of four men who had exposed the whole of the upper part of his figure to the light.

Then the entire League contracted its folds, and eleven knives, long-bladed and murderous-looking, were thrust against his breast and held there by hands that never quavered!

"Swear that you will never reveal to mortal ear anything concerning the Brethren of the Gold League, of which order you become a member to-night. Swear that you will execute every command that shall come to you from the High Chief of the League, even though you are commanded to take the life of your dearest friend. Do you swear?"

The brain of the boy seemed to reel, he saw a thousand masks before him, and knowing not what his lips said, he framed the word, "I swear," and staggered back.

"The seal, Salvo! Quick!"

The man at the fire sprung up and darted forward, a red-hot iron in his hand.

The next moment a groan of terrible pain welled from the boy's heart, a sickening smoke hid his face, and as the brand seared his breast, he sunk to the ground like a dead man!

Half an hour later he awoke and started up.

He was still in the cave, and the fire was burning on the floor; but where were the Brethren of the Gold League?

"Thank Heaven! it was all a dream!" he cried.

A dream?

Why was his flesh so painful, if his initiation was only a dream?

To convince himself, he tore his garments apart, and saw the brand of a bowie-knife on his breast!

A cry of horror pealed from his throat.

He was a member of the accursed Gold League!

And, as he started back, he happened to cast his eyes at the wall, and there he saw traced in great white letters the single word—"REMEMBER!"

"Yes; I will remember!" he cried. "And may I die friendless and alone if I do not avenge this dastardly outrage. Brethren of the Gold League beware!"

Foolish boy, beware yourself!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GOLD LEAGUE VISIT RED CORE.

"Now for the other one," said the chief of the masked men, as they left the cave where the boy lay in a swoon beside the fire, the brand of the accursed League on his breast.

"Which other one—the Injun?"

"Yes;" and the speaker's eyes had a malicious glitter. "Injun Jack."

Then the Gold League knew that Injun Jack was in the country.

Did they intend to make him wear the brand of brotherhood?

We shall see.

At a secluded spot not far from the cave the twelve found horses enough to accommodate the entire party. These animals were guarded by a man who did not wear a mask. He was a fierce repulsive looking fellow, and his forehead was bound with a coarse cloth that was quite bloody. Not only was he thus situated, but his left arm lay in a rude mountain sling.

Not far from where the horses stood lay two huge dogs, dead. The carcasses had been perforated by bullets and hacked by knives, and they told the story of the conflict which Tornado Jr. had heard, but could not see.

The Indian's dogs had not fared well at the hands of the mountain Brotherhood.

After the exchange of a few words with the guard, the League sprung to saddle and rode away, each one wearing the long gray mask.

Not a word was spoken or a rein drawn until the thirteen came suddenly upon the little cabin which we have once or twice visited in the course of our story.

Red Core, silent, and, to all outward appearances, untenanted, lay before them.

Day was breaking again, and the little house was distinctly visible.

For a moment the League took it in with its surroundings, when, at a sign from their chief, the entire band trotted forward and drew rein before the front door.

All at once the League chief leaned forward and struck the door several sharp blows with the butt of his piece, then straightening up in the saddle again, waited for an answer.

It was not long delayed, for the door began to open, and every rifle went to shoulder.

But the next instant a cry of surprise went upward from every Leaguer's lips, for, in the doorway stood, not the well-knit and sun-tanned figure of Injun Jack, but a real vision of loveliness—a young girl fresh from her couch, and as beautiful as the morn.

Olive!

It was evident that she had expected to open the door to a person who would have been welcomed across the threshold, for there was a smile of greeting on her lips; but the next instant she started back with a white face and a cry of girlish terror.

The sight was enough to unnerve her heart.

"Hello! we hardly expected to see an angel!" exclaimed the captain of the League. "Don't run off an' get yourself into trouble. Stay where you are. We don't intend to hurt you in the least—not if you obey us."

There was something in the last half of the man's sentence that sent a chill to Olive's heart.

She had started to retreat into the cabin, but at the sound of the captain's voice she stopped, and faced the guns aimed at her breast.

"Where's your pard? Where's Injun Jack?" asked the chief.

"He is asleep," replied Olive.

"Asleep after all our noise here? Come, girl, no shenanigan."

"If my word has no value, come in and see."

He has been sick; he was sick all day yesterday."

The leader eyed the beautiful speaker as if he would pierce her soul and read her inmost thoughts.

"Call him out!" he said at last.

Olive turned half-way around, and called Injun Jack twice in her sweet voice, but there was no response.

"You know, sir, how a sick man sleeps when he is weary," she said turning again to the thirteen.

"Go and wake him," was the answer, accompanied by an oath which had hardly ceased to sound when the girl disappeared.

The men on horseback listened intently, with rifles at their shoulders. More than one were half inclined to believe that the girl was deceiving them; but when they heard her voice within trying to rouse somebody from sleep, they began to feel at ease.

"Confound the girl!" growled the impatient captain of the League at length. "Injun Jack must be as dead as a herring. I'll fetch 'im!"

With the last sentence the speaker threw one leg over the saddle-horn preparatory to dismounting, and was about to leap to the ground when he was checked by the sudden return of the girl.

"By Jove!" we're euchered! was the exclamation heard on all sides. "She lied to git the dead drop on us."

Well might the Brethren of the Gold League thus exclaim, for, standing in the doorway, with a rifle at her shoulder and fire flashing from her eyes, was the Queen of Red Core.

"A lie! Yes! a lie will not be recorded against any one when it was coined to baffle such beings as you are!" came over the shining barrel of the deadly repeater. "Injun Jack would have replied to your early knock with the contents of his revolvers if he had been at home to receive you. When he is absent I do the honors of the house. My hand is on the trigger. At the first sign of shoot on your part, I'll send a bullet crashing through your leader's brain. He is in my power."

If the mask had at that moment been lifted from one face in that grotesque line, Olive would have seen a spectacle of fear.

"What do you want of Injun Jack, and who are you?"

"We are the Brethren of the Gold League and wish to see him."

Olive started slightly.

"I will tell Injun Jack. I am sure that he would have remained at home if he had expected you. Will you call again?"

A moment's silence followed the question which was put in the most sarcastic of tones.

"We will if we don't find Injun Jack elsewhere," suddenly cried the captain of the League. "Tell him that he has to kill thirteen men before he can put his hand on one ounce of the gold he seeks. We know what brought him to these parts just as well as you do. We are here for the same purpose. We have banded ourselves together and taken an oath to find the big bonanza, and to kill all who stand between us and its ores! As for Injun Jack, he might save his life by leaving the country *at once*, and

you, my tiger-girl, you would improve your health by followin' him!"

The first answer was a silvery laugh full of defiance that came over the weapon that covered the captain's heart.

"Injun Jack came to these parts not to find the gold mine for himself, but to enrich one whom he loves best!" said Red Core's Queen. "When you suggest that he might save himself by flight, it only proves to me that you don't know him. We are going to stand together—Jack and I. And whenever you desire to open the battle I am sure that you will find us ready. I am not so sure but that I ought to begin hostilities now."

The Gold League captain instinctively recoiled in his saddle as he saw the girl's eyes return to the rifle, and Olive's lips curled with a contemptuous smile at his exhibition of fear.

"Go!" she said. "When you come again there will be two to receive you. Injun Jack and I against the Brethren of the Gold League. We accept the challenge. Now depart!"

"First, look here, my tiger-girl—"

"Go!"

"Give me a word—just one!"

"Not a word! I'll empty your saddle if you persist in speaking. About face or die!"

The captain of the masks ground his teeth. Then, with a mad oath, he turned—his men were already wheeling—and the next moment the Queen of the Red Core saw the backs of her morning callers.

A moment later the horses were spurred into a gallop, and the Queen of Red Core was left in solitary possession of her second battle-field.

Half an hour later the girl was again called to the door of the cabin; but this time she uttered a cry of joy and sprung into the arms of Injun Jack.

"Did you see them?"

"Them? Who?—No!"

"The Brethren of the Gold League. They were here to see you—thirteen men with long white masks. And they swore that you will have to kill them all before you touch one ounce of the lost gold."

"They did?" was the reply. "All right, Queen Olive. The gold is going to be ours in spite of the masked thirteen!"

She gave him a look of pride.

CHAPTER IX.

SET FREE BY MISTAKE.

"Kin I git out? Tornado, you must!"

A hundred times Tornado Tom had asked himself the question just recorded, only to answer in the words that followed:

"Tornado, you must!"

But was not every avenue of escape shut against him? Had he not felt every inch of the wall as far up as his hands could reach? Had he not subjected the floor to the same scrutiny? And this a thousand times.

His scarlet foes knew well the dungeon to which they had consigned him—that while there he would never find the boss bonanza, and that he would perish miserably where he had fallen.

He possessed his knife and a brace of revolvers, but of what avail were they?

"I must think of nothin' but how to git out!"

he exclaimed. "Never give up! That's the idee, Tornado. Never say die while yer breathin' apparatus ar' in order."

But the hours passed away, the day whose morning had witnessed his imprisonment gave place to night, but Tornado knew it not.

Where he was it was always night.

All at once—it was at the end of his thousandth journey around his prison—a sound struck the ear trained to catch the slightest noises.

Old Tornado paused and looked up, although he knew he could see nothing. But suddenly a light not like that produced by a torch, but similar to the light of an electric spark, flashed star-like in the darkness overhead.

"They think that they've come back to hold an inquest over ye, Tornado," murmured the gold-hunter, and the next instant he lay on the ground like a man killed by falling from a great height, but from under the arms that partly hid his face he kept his eyes fixed on the now brilliant light.

As he looked he saw more clearly, and all at once an object appeared far above, a human head, as he verily believed, but such a queer-looking one!

"What in the name of saltpeter does that mean?" he thought. "Hev they got an order ov hoods hyar like they had among the Shasta mines? By Jupiter it begins to look that way."

Then another hooded head appeared beside the first, and another and another, until the astonished man counted seven, and the eyes of each were intently fixed upon him!

For several minutes this inspection of the mine and its occupant went on, when one of the masks said:

"The fall would have killed a cat. No harm in going down there."

Tornado's heart gave a great leap.

Those hooded men were coming down to him!

"Mebbe, cap'n—"

"Mebbe thunder!" was the interruption. "He hasn't moved a foot since he struck. I'll bet my life on that. Here, the rope."

The hoods talked as if they were familiar with the circumstances of his last mishap, and Tornado could not but grind his teeth as he listened.

Presently he saw the end of a rope drop over the edge of the wall; it contained a loop—a stirrup for a foot.

Then the body of a man glided into view, the stirrup was filled, and Tornado saw one of the hoods descending!

"Steady up there with the cord," called out the mask to the brethren who were lowering him into the pit. "Move the light back a little—it dazzles my eyes—that! Now a little faster. I'll fetch up proof of the old fellar's wipin' out."

How intensely the seeming dead man at the bottom of the old mine watched the Brother of the Gold League cannot be told. Thoughts did not chase one another through his brain. He allowed but one to occupy it, and that was the thought of escape.

Tornado actually thought that the time had come.

Nearer and nearer to him came the gray hood, and at last he saw the man land a few feet away.

The next moment he left the rope and came toward the captive.

"Well, old chicken, dead as a nail!"

Dead? All at once one of the arms that should have been rigid leaped at the muslin guarded throat, and a second later the Gray Hood of the Gold League lay at Tornado's feet.

A blow had followed the grasp, and all was still!

"Now fur the top!" fell from the gold-hunter's lips as he sprung to the rope that dangled over the wall far above, and thrusting his foot into the stirrup he gave two quick impatient jerks.

Ha! the rope grew taut again.

He was rising!

Swiftly but not before he could collect his thoughts, Tornado Tom approached the top.

Hand over hand the unseen Hoods pulled away, and at last Tornado put up his right hand to seize the edge of the wall.

"Hyar, ye ar', capt'n!" exclaimed several rough voices, and the next moment the gaunt prisoner clutched the cliff.

But his ears were immediately filled with cries of genuine horror, and the several masks that had looked over the edge suddenly disappeared.

At the same time the rope was liberated, and fell from his foot, and he found himself suspended over the abyss by the frail hold of his hands!

The sight upon which the three members of the Brotherhood had looked was enough to startle them, for instead of the Gray Hood of their order they saw the haggard but vengeance-lined features of Tornado Tom.

With the shouts of amazement, the light shot past him, and went out on the dungeon floor; but he still clung to the top of the wall, for to fall was to die.

"Now or never, Tornado," he said to himself. Remember, old fellar, that ye must git out!"

He did exert himself to the utmost, and by the mightiest effort of his life in the self-lifting line, drew himself from the very jaws of death!

Once out of the pit he did not pause for self-congratulations, but drew his revolvers and started toward a star that seemed on a line with his eyes, but so far away.

"Tornado ar' himself ag'in. Now ther'll be somebody hurt. Ef you won't come on, stan' whar ye ar', you miserable night-faces, as I'll meet ye on yer own ground."

But there was no response, and the rescued man found himself in the starlight without a foe in sight.

"Thar 're more'n me an' Injun Jack arter the boss bonanza," he said. "Seven white men in masks. Thar war seven but thar's only six now!" and his eyes glittered with triumph as they glanced backward at the old mine.

The fresh mountain air seemed new life to the man, and he might have drank it in indefinitely if a voice at his side had not startled him.

"Still huntin' fur it, pard?"

Tornado turned abruptly with a revolver in his hand.

"Put up the toy. See! I've got the persimmons over you," continued the same voice. "What do you say to poolin' our issues and—" "Thunders! is it you?"

Tornado Tom had halted before the man toward whom he had sprung with mad intent and was staring into his face.

It was Injun Jack from Red Core!

CHAPTER X.

THE BRAND OF THE BOWIE.

THE enemies stood face to face again.

The arm which Tornado Tom had lifted against his adversary fell at his side bloodless.

Injun Jack had covered him with a six shooter, and it was over the glistening barrel of this weapon of death that the proposition to "pool issues" had come.

Tornado was startled at Jack's words.

"Pool our issues, Injun Jack?" he said. "Thar must be more'n one trail to the boss bonanza."

"Old Shady never heard of more than one."

"Old Shady?" echoed Tom, amazed. "Did you know 'im? Sometimes we called 'im Old Icicle."

"Of course. But what do you say? Shall we pool our issues?"

A great stride on Tom's part brought the two men together, and the eyes of the gold hunter looked searchingly into the face of Injun Jack.

"Why?" he asked. "Tell me fairly an' squar'ly, why."

"In union thar is strength," was the answer. "You saw the Gray Hoods that rode away from here not long since. You know what they are after. So do I. They were at Red Core last night, an' they told Queen Olive what we had to do or die. They will tell you an' your boy the same thing when they meet you. Now, I come squar'ly to the point, Tornado. Let us pool our issues as against the Gold League, an' fight them together. Injun Jack an' Tornado Tom! Think what a team them two names would make. Thar's gold enough for both of us in the boss bonanza—enough to make the youngsters rich as Jews."

But Tornado shook his head.

"Ye'r' mistaken, Injun; thar can't be too much for Tornado Jr."

"Well," and a smile flitted over Injun Jack's face, "well, after we have whipped the Gray Hoods we will fight for the mine."

Tornado's eyes glittered.

"That propositon strikes me solid!" he exclaimed. "Ar' you honest in it, Injun Jack?"

The right hand of the man from Red Core shot toward Tornado, and the next moment the two men clasped hands.

"First, the Gold League larkies, an' then ourselves," said Tom.

"That's the bargain!" was the response, and the compact was made.

Then Injun Jack was made to listen to Tornado's account of his adventures, at the end of which the oath against the Gold League was renewed, and the two men lately enemies started off shoulder to shoulder.

Tornado Tom had not tasted food for forty-

eight hours, and he was anxious to reach the hill-side cave, where he expected to find his *protege*, and something that would relieve his ravenous appetite.

Injun Jack could hardly keep up with him, but at length the cave was reached and the half-famished man dashed in, heedless of any danger that might be incurred by such action.

"Tornado Jr., where ar' you? Hyar I am, back ag'in, but hungry as a wolf. Hello! youngster!"

The sonorous echoes of the cave made the only response.

"The boy is gone!" said Injun Jack. "May be the Hoods have been here."

"Let 'em touch the boy!" flashed Old Tornado. "Jest let any hand than mine touch 'im, an' somebody will need a coffin in these parts."

A moment later the flashing of a lucifer began to dissipate the gloom. Tom was holding it against a bunch of the inner lining of bark, and very soon a comfortable torch lit up the scene.

"Look yonder!" suddenly exclaimed Injun Jack. "Is that your work?"

"Thunders! no! nor the boy's either!" was the answer that fell from Tornado's lips as he stared at the word "remember" chalked on the cave wall.

"Then they have been here," continued the man from Red Core, and he added to himself: "The gold will all fall to Queen Olive now. The boy is out of my road."

Tornado approached the spot with the flaming torch, and examined the tracery on the wall.

"REMEMBER!"

"Yes, we'll remember!" he flashed, wheeling upon Injun Jack, up to whom he madly strode. "Injun pard, we'll remember them hooded devils, and every one ov 'em shall remember us! They left that word thar fur—me? No! they thought me dead."

"Then for whom?"

Tornado Tom was puzzled, and his gaze flitted from the speaker to the word on the wall and back again.

"By Jehu! I'm stuck, pard," he said. "But no difference. We'll remember 'em all the same."

After that the place was ransacked, but no trace of Tornado Jr. was found. But the old hunter discovered that which appeased his hunger, and Injun Jack watched him as he ravenously devoured the jerked venison.

All at once Tornado Tom paused and looked at his comrade.

"Didn't you hear it?" he asked.

"No! What?"

"Out thar! Come!"

The meat fell from Tornado's hands, and springing up, he darted toward the opening.

Injun Jack was at his heels, however, and Tom carefully lifted the vines.

"War it nuthin'—?" he began.

"No! look yonder. Injuns!"

The interruption was unnecessary, for at the same moment Tornado saw the ghostlike figures that stood not far away.

And the two men contemplated the specters unseen themselves, but with their hands on their revolvers.

"Hold yer breath hard, fur they're comin' this way," suddenly whispered Tom into Injun Jack's ear.

The figures were moving, and that almost directly toward the cavern.

Suddenly Injun Jack started, and an oath so loud fell from his lips that his comrade turned toward him with a look of madness.

"They've been to Red Core—the red devils have!" cried Jack.

"Why so?"

"Where are your eyes? Who is that on the fifth horse?"

Tom instinctively looked at the disappearing forms and noted the fifth horse.

The figure on the back of this particular animal was not Indianified, and despite the dim light, Tom saw enough to exclaim:

"The gal, by Jehu! They hev been to Red Core, sart'in!"

"Yes, to Red Core, an' when Injun Jack was not on hand!" was the quick reply, and the speaker would have darted from the cave if the vise-like gripe of Tornado had not detained him.

"You're furgittin' the Gray Hoods. Don't go out thar an' waste yer life fur the gal."

"Not even fur Queen Olive?"

"Not even fur her!"

The answer was a mad wrench, but Tornado's gripe never loosened.

"Remember! that's the word, Injun Jack. We're to fight fur the bonanza when we hev wiped out the Gold League. You must keep yer part ov the barg'in. I'm goin' to keep mine."

"But I must save Queen Olive. I will!"

The next instant the two men were struggling in the gloom of the narrow corridor—Tornado Tom trying to keep Injun Jack back, and the latter attempting to release himself that he might rush to the rescue of the rider of the fifth horse.

The two men were so equally matched in strength that the fierce struggle was for a long time doubtful, and at last they both fell heavily in the light of the still blazing torch.

Injun Jack was uppermost.

"Now I will go," he hissed. "Tornado Tom, I could kill you here, but I will not. Injun Jack never broke an agreement in his life, an' the compact what we made awhile ago shall be sacredly kept on his part."

"Then go."

The tawny hands of the gaunt gold-hunter relaxed their gripe, and before he could rise the handsome figure of Injun Jack bounded away.

Tornado Tom sprung to his feet and darted after him, but the vines dropped quivering before the cave door, and he saw the figure of the man from Red Core flit like a Nemesis through the starlight.

"Wal, let 'im go!" he murmured turning back toward the cave. "I'll keep my part ov the agreement, too. We'll hunt the Gray Hoods together, an' then fight to the death fur the boss bonanza. Remember! that's the word fur ye, Tornado. Awake er asleep, don't furgit it."

"Hold! that word belongs to me!"

Tornado Tom turned as if an adder had hissed behind him.

"Wal, by my life! the boy!" he exclaimed.

"Say, little one, hev ye risen from the dead? Whar in the name ov goodness hev ye been?"

With one bound Tornado had reached the apparition, and his hands were clutching the youth's arms while he was gazing—nay, staring into the upturned face.

"Let me go!" cried Tornado Jr. as he suddenly wrenched himself from the hands, and before they could regrasp him he stood beside the word on the wall, a bowie-knife in his clutch and vengeance in his eyes.

"This word is my property!" he cried. "I have cause to remember; you have none. Claim it, if you dare! You have been absent almost three days; you deserted me! I know what brought you to this country—a gold-mine whose wealth is without end. I have as good a right to be a moneymaking as you, Tornado. I have found the gold-mine!"

A wild cry broke from Tornado Tom's throat.

"You, boy?" he cried, darting forward. "Whar is it?"

"Yes, where is it?" was the taunt. "That is for me to know and for you to find out! I will be the gold king of Idaho, while you, who deserted me, can stay here or go back to Omaha as poor as you left it. Ha! ha! Tornado! how does the prospect suit you?"

A mad oath was the response.

"Stand where you are!" shouted the boy. "You touch me at the risk of your life. I am not alone now. Look! use well your eyes and remember. I belong to the Brethren of the Gold League. Behold the sign!"

At the same time the boy tore open his jacket, and revealed the bowie-knife burned into his breast.

A wild cry resounded throughout the cave, and the torch which Tom had picked up fell at his feet!

Then a figure darted past him.

CHAPTER XI.

BUCK TAIL'S SECRET.

THE eyes of Injun Jack had not deceived him. The Indians had been to Red Core, and the rider of "the fifth horse" was none other than the Queen of that little kingdom.

If the Gray Hoods had failed, they at least had triumphed. Stratagem had given them a captive, and the girl who had awed the desperate Gold League fell easily into the hands of the red-skins.

She was not tied to the animal that carried her along, but the bridle-rein of buffalo-cord was held by the young Indian that rode at her side.

More than once Olive caught the painted face of the brave turned toward her, and saw the eyes glow with real Indian desire and triumph.

Suddenly he leaned forward and touched her arm:

"Buck Tail had two dogs last night," he said.

"Olive did not reply, but gave him a look which said: "Well, what of it?"

"Dogs gone now; never run by. Buck Tail's side ag'in. Man in white—him face all covered, too much for dogs."

Olive started at the young Indian's reference to the Brethren.

"Buck Tail never git such dogs ag'in," con-

tinued the Idaho. "Him must have something in their place, so him take gal. What gal say, eh?"

The look that overspread the young buck's face could not be mistaken.

"When gal say nothin' that mean yes!" he cried. "Gal not so good as dogs, mebbe, but Buck Tail must be satisfied. Other Injuns not like it, p'raps, but Buck Tail ready for 'em; see!" and he put his hand on the knife and revolver that peeped above his girdle.

What! were the Indians going to fight for her? The Queen of the Red Core shuddered.

"You shall not fight for me. I will not permit that," she said at last.

The eyes of Buck Tail fairly glittered with delight.

"Good! white gal give herself to Buck Tail!" he cried.

"I did not say so!" flashed Olive, resentfully. "I am a captive, and must submit to the commands of your chief who calls himself Red Robe."

"Red Robe!" echoed Buck Tail, deviously. "Him no got much power. Gal must not furgit that she take place of the two dogs that the gold-hunter kill last night."

Olive's lips came firmly together, and her eyes shot lightnings at the impudent Indian, but she did not answer him.

"When he undertakes to take possession of his claim he shall hear from me!" she said, resolutely, to herself.

When the capturing band halted, daylight revealed them more fully to the solitary prisoner.

Olive now plainly saw the fantastic head-dresses, the painted bodies and the fierce looks.

The scenery that surrounded her was, she felt, far from Red Core; it was rough, mountainous, strange.

She was suddenly lifted from the horse by the chief, Red Robe, and soon found herself in the middle of a circle of hideous faces, chief among them the redoubtable Buck Tail's.

Suddenly Red Robe addressed her.

"White girl no live alone in little lodge?" he said.

"No."

"Gold-hunter with her?"

"That is true."

"Him no find mine yet?"

Olive's sweeping glance showed her twenty Indians impatient for her reply.

"I do not know."

Twenty countenances fell.

"Girl, tell truth!"

A latent threat was in the admonition.

"I am telling it!" she retorted.

"Where white hunter?"

This interrogative came from an Indian at Olive's right.

"I do not know."

"Him not leave girl alone without tellin' her where him goin' an' when him come back."

Silence was Queen Olive's reply, and when she turned her eyes again to Red Robe it was not before she had seen the hand of her last questioner glide menacingly to his belt.

"I must be cautious; my life is in peril here," ran through her mind.

"What white girl know about the hidden faces?" suddenly asked the chief.

"Nothing. I never saw beneath a single mask."

"They all ride toward gold-hunter's lodge, stay long time. White girl surely see 'em. She knows 'em, an' she must not lie to the Idahoos!"

"True! They did come to our cabin, but for no good," Olive said. "I drove them away with a rifle."

The Indians looked from the girl into each others' faces, and when she caught their eyes again she saw many a look of contempt and incredulity.

The ordeal was coming.

"White girl's words all lies!" said Red Robe. "She know where gold-mine is. She must tell!"

"What I do not know I cannot reveal," was the response.

A knife leaped from the Idaho's belt, and he took a stride toward the Queen of Red Core.

Olive did not flinch, but her eyes encountered the Indian's look without dropping.

"Tell!" thundered Red Robe, pausing before her. "The girl must show the Indians the trail that leads to the gold-mine, or her heart will rot where she stands!"

"Then, brute, you must do your worst. But give me the revolver that sticks in your belt, and we will see if more than one heart does not rot here!"

The Indian sprung like a tiger upon Red Core's Queen, and as he seized her arm the knife flashed over his crest.

"Girl no tell?"

"No!"

Olive did not know that they were only trying her; she thought that she was about to die when, in reality, her life was safe even in the hands that held the knife aloft.

The other savages were ready to applaud the girl's firmness, and laugh at Red Robe's discomfiture, when the loud reports of a dozen rifles rung in their ears, and the forms of the Indians staggered hither and thither around the girl.

The survivors sprung back and turned toward the mountain on the left with wild cries of fright and defiance, to see a dozen masked men seated on as many horses, and at the shoulder of each rider was a rifle from which the bolts of death had just leaped.

Olive, too, started back with a cry at sight of the gray masks; but before she could recover she was violently jerked from the ground, and the next moment she felt herself being borne rapidly away on the back of a horse!

At first she noticed that several Indians rode on either side, but these soon dropped out of sight, and but one horse shot through a canyon still unlit by the dawn.

Buck Tail had distanced friends and foes alike, and when he emerged from the chasm, he looked down into Olive's face and uttered a cry of triumph.

"No fightin' fur white gal now," he exclaimed. "Her all b'long to Buck Tail. Red Robe an' the rest fall when the hidden faces shoot! One ball nearly find Buck Tail's heart. It go through his arm. See!"

And the Indian held his bleeding arm before Olive's eyes, and grated his teeth while he gazed at his wound.

"Buck Tail able to make his wife rich," continued the young Indian. "Him been keepin' something in his heart ever since him been a boy. Would girl like to see?"

"He is talking about the wonderful gold mine! What if he has discovered it?" thought Olive.

Then she said:

"You cannot make your wife rich. Your secret amounts to nothing."

The Indian's eyes fairly danced

"Girl see pretty soon!" he cried. "Buck Tail will let her know what him been keepin' to himself so long."

All at once the Idaho guided his horse into a pass between two rugged hills, and Olive held her breath.

"Oh, if Jack was following me at this moment!" said her heart.

Wilder grew the scenery as the horse advanced, and almost suddenly the Queen of Red Core found herself in Cimmerian darkness.

Buck Tail sprung from the horse and helped his captive from the saddle.

"Stand still!" he said.

Olive obeyed.

All at once she felt her hand grasped, and then she was led away. For many minutes she seemed to descend into the bowels of the earth; the unseen path which she trod was littered with stones that often rolled under her feet and almost threw her; and the young Idaho at last took her in his arms and carried her along.

At last the Indian stopped and put his burden down, and a moment later the flashing of flints dazzled the girl's eyes, then the little flame of the igniting torch.

"Girl want to know Buck Tail's secret, eh?" said the Idaho, coming up to her with a face illuminated with savage joy. "Her want to know how him kin make his wife rich? Let her open all the doors of her eyes an' see!"

Again her hand was taken by the Indian, and she was led away. The torch did not throw much light on their surroundings, but Olive knew that they were far beneath the surface of the ground, and in a place which had been made by human hands.

"Girl see now!" said Buck Tail, as he halted at last, and swept the torch before him and near the ground.

Olive saw a great many ill-shaped rocks scattered in confusion about her feet, and one of them was suddenly thrust into her hand by the Idaho.

She started back with a cry, for the rock seemed unnaturally heavy.

It must contain gold!

"Let white girl look!" said Buck Tail, holding the torch before her eyes. "Has she ever seen gold stones before?"

"Often."

The Queen of Red Core was amazed. The rock in her hands appeared to be a lump of gold.

"Mine full of 'em!" exclaimed the Idaho, waving the torch around his head. "Now white girl know what Buck Tail keep in his heart so long. Many moons ago when him was

a boy him discovered the old gold mine that has been lost so long. Him never told any one, for him said: 'Buck Tail will keep it for his squaw.' Ha! will not the white girl be richer as Buck Tail's wife than as the slave of the pale-faces?"

Olive made no reply.

The gold mine—the dream of Injun Jack's ambition—had been rediscovered.

And she—she actually stood in it, and held one of the nuggets in her hands!

CHAPTER XII.

CLOSE QUARTERS.

TORNADO TOM stood bewildered in the cave for many moments after the boy's departure.

The torch flaring at his feet told him that the youth had actually fled.

But he still saw the brand of the bowie, as it had been dramatically revealed, and heard these words:

"I have found the mine!"

When the old fellow at last roused himself it was to start forward with an oath whose echoes made the cavern ring.

"Hez that cub gone back on me—outwitted me an' found the big bonanza himself?" he exclaimed. "An' what did he show me? the brand ov a dirk on his breast—the mark ov the Brethren, an' he told me to tech 'im if I dared! Jest ez ef I war afeard ov that hooded party, an' jest ez ef I—Tornado Tom—hed anything ag'in' him! By Jehu! I'm gittin' inter another mystery. Why did he jine the Gold League? He said I deserted him. Ef he knew whar I hev been, he'd never hev made that charge ag'in' Tornado—never! But the bonanza? He says he hes found it. No! I won't b'lieve that. He war ta'ntin' me. He's a Gold Leaguer, that's sart'in; but the story about findin' the mine—that's all bosh!"

Tornado Tom saw nothing human when he went to the mouth of the cave.

"I'm a fool to let the boy git away so easy. When he hears my story he'll take back the charge ov desartion, an' we'll git along together ag'in. Injun Jack will hev a time with the Injuns what hed the Queen ov Red Core. I hope he won't git 'er back; I do by jingo. Me an' the boy will come to an understandin', an' things will move on once more."

Tom saw nothing as he passed through the starlit valley that lay below the cave.

He traversed it with a heavy revolver in his right hand, ready for use at a second's notice.

For whom was he hunting? the boy?

Injun Jack was evidently following Olive's trail, and Tornado did not think any more about him, for he was confident that the man from Red Core was able to take care of himself, and that they would both live to fight hand-to-hand for the gold mine.

"The night-huntin' never did pan out well fur me. I'll go back," he exclaimed disgusted, and stopping suddenly midway in a canyon several miles from the cave, he whirled on his heel and began to retrace his steps.

He had resolved to let Tornado Jr. go for the present, at least until daylight.

"This is home but without the youngster," he ejaculated finding himself once more in the

cavern of the hill. "I'll jest finish thet interrupted supper afore I retire."

He picked up the torch which the brand of the bowie had frightened from his hand, and after a little labor relit it.

But as the flame flashed up he sprung back with a hoarse cry of astonishment.

At the same time his revolver leaped clicking from his belt.

Tornado had walked into the deadliest of traps.

He actually stood in the midd'e of a circle of masked men, each one of whom held a cocked revolver almost against his person.

The Brethren of the Gold League!

Tom, although well frightened, did not drop the torch this time. He clung firmly to it, for it enabled him to see his enemies, to gaze into the eyes that burned beneath the gray masks.

A glance told him that he was completely surrounded; the gap by which he had entered the trap had been closed.

"The boy isn't hyar," thought Tornado as he failed to find his *protege* in a sweeping glance round the circle, and then facing the stalwart Brother who stood before him he said:

"Wal, what do you want with old Tornado? Let's proceed to bizness."

"Are you anxious that we should go on?" came from beneath the mask.

Tom started. He was certain that he had heard the voice before.

"Wal," he said, "I never like to keep anybody waitin'. So you ar' the Brethren ov the Gold League?"

"We are."

"I've met seven ov you afore, an' you pulled the wool most beautifully over my eyes. But then the light war unsart'in. By the jumpin' jingo! you make up well as Injuns."

Tom saw more than one eye glisten with suppressed merriment.

"You did not suspect us?"

"Not until I war down under the mountain whar I left one ov yer band."

The eyes of the masks flashed now.

"Are you ready, Tornado?"

"Ready fur what?"

"For the sentence of the Brethren of the Gold League."

"You are goin' to wipe me out without givin' me a show fur my white alley?"

"Mercy for mercy!" was the stern rejoinder. "You feigned death in the underground dungeon; you waited for our Brother, and when he came down you killed him. Mercy for mercy! That is one of the cardinal principles of our Brotherhood."

"Then go on."

The revolver hung from Tornado's hand at his side. To lift it would be to fall riddled by bullets; so the tawny man desisted.

"Brethren of the Gold League, what shall be the doom of the captive?" said the chief.

"Death!" came the answer.

Every tongue had spoken.

A moment's silence followed.

"Brethren of the League, what shall be death's agent?"

"The revolver."

"In whose hands?"

"Our last member's."

"Bring in the executioner!"

Two men silently withdrew from the circle.

"Tom Taggart, your end is at hand," said the chief addressing our old hero. "We grant you the easiest death in our code. You gave our Brother one that never pained him. What have you to say before the executioner stands before you?"

"Nothin', only—it's something thet I'd rather the rest wouldn't hear."

"Individual members of the League are not permitted to become confessors. Your last words must greet all ears alike."

"Then what I war goin' to say I'll keep to myself!"

The chief of the band looked disappointed out of his eyes; but Tornado had sealed his lips and drawn his gaunt figure to its full stature.

All at once a voice came from toward the entrance.

"The executioner is here."

"Let him advance."

A moment later two masks stepping apart made a gap in the circle at Tornado's right, and a figure was pushed into the light.

Tom uttered a cry of horror.

Tornado Jr. stood before him, a revolver in his right hand and a bandage over his eyes.

"Whose voice was that?" cried the boy, starting toward the ring. "Tear your accursed blindfold from my eyes, and let me see whom you want to make me kill! You made me one of you when I was powerless; you branded me and made me take your pitiless oath to obey your commands. Now you would make me take a human life, and bind me to your League with the cords of murder. No! no! I will never do that. Off with this blindfold. Let me see!"

As the boy uttered the last words a figure stepped from the circle, and a rapid movement tore the bandage away.

Tornado Jr. uttered a shriek as he saw.

"I thought I knew your victim's voice," he cried, starting from Old Tornado and whirling upon the leader of the League. "And you have chosen me to kill that man. Never!"

"Remember!" was the response.

"I cannot forget."

"He deserted you."

"No, I did not desert you, boy," cried Tornado. "I fell into the clutches ov these devils—"

"Silence or death!" thundered the League.

Strange to say, the prisoner did not finish the sentence, but shot looks of eternal hatred at the Brethren.

"Disobey and die! Remember the oath and the brand of the bowie over your heart!" warned the chief to the white-faced boy before him. "Executioner, look at the prisoner."

"And kill him—old Tornado? I'll die first!"

The words rung with sharp vehemence through the cave, and with them the boy threw the revolver at the chief's feet, and stepped proudly and defiantly back!

"Now carry out your threat!" he cried. "The oath has been broken!"

Instantly the revolvers of the League were turned upon the daring boy, but the next moment a loud voice startled every one.

"Lower the weepins, every one ov ye, fur old Tornado holds death in his hands fur more'n two or three! Down with the revolvers, er die!"

A glance at the speaker showed his position.

He had seized his opportunity, and, having sprung back clear of the hooded ranks, he stood erect, the torch in the hand over his head, and the revolver in the one stretched toward the chief!

The Brethren looked at their leader. He had started back, but his life was still in the hands of old Tornado.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT TWO REVOLVERS DID.

"LOWER the weepins! Uncover the boy!" demanded Tornado Tom, savagely.

The lifted revolvers fell slowly to their owners' sides, but the fingers of the Brethren twitched nervously at the triggers.

The tables had been turned.

The flash of victory lit up Tornado's deep-set eyes.

"You will oblige me by removin' yer mask," he said quietly to the chief of the League. "I want ter see whether I am right er wrong."

There was no reply except a start by the person addressed.

Tornado Jr. had glided to his protector's side and the revolver that he had taken from the old man's belt was cocked in his right hand.

"Ar'n't you goin' to take off the cloth?" cried Tom a minute later. "If you won't then I'll proceed to put a hole through it."

An oath came from beneath the mask as a hand crept doggedly up to it; but at the throat it paused, and the eyes of the League chief for a moment flashed defiance at Tornado.

"Jest as you like. The mask kin rot off!"

As his thin lips closed behind the last word, the report of his revolver filled the cavern with a deafening noise and the chief staggered back, a dark spot in the gray cloth that covered his forehead.

"Me an' Injun Jack hev pooled our issues!" rung through the smoke of the deadly weapon. "An' ez we've got to fight to the death fur the boss bonanza, we might ez well begin hyar ez anywhar else. Now, Gray Hoods, ef you want to try the boy an' me, jest sail in!"

But, statue-like, the Brethren of the Gold League stood before the twain under the flaming torch.

"Don't want to try us, eh? Wal, we'll separate fur the present. But afore long we'll meet ag'in, an' then fur some sport with the repeater."

All at once the torch fell at Tornado's feet, and a moment later the cave was wrapped in gloom.

Almost at the same moment the boy felt a hand force him to the ground just as the revolvers of the League spoke.

But the bullets fortunately whistled over their heads, and a dash was made for the entrance, which was gained.

Old Tornado held the hand of the boy as they ran through the starlight, nor was a halt made until they found themselves far from the scene of the tragedy.

When the gold-hunter stopped he turned abruptly upon his *protege*.

"Boy, do you know who I wiped out back yander?" he asked, his eyes still full of excitement.

"Why, the leader of the Gold League."

"More'n that. Ef you war to go back thar an' lift his mask you'd gaze into Old Shady's face."

"Old Shady?" asked the boy. "Who is he?"

"By jingo! I never did tell you about 'im," exclaimed Tom.

"Never."

"Wal, Old Shady war a ramblin', curious old chicken what knew more about the kentry west ov the Missouri than the Injuns themselves. I knew 'im long afore me an' you pooled our fortins. Three years ago he nudged his way into Omaha, and got a dose from Moccasin Mike what laid 'im out. The old chap didn't seem to hev many friends, so I took an interest in 'im, an' I thought I'd try to fetch 'im through. Fur a while he got the upper hand ov death, an' promised to come out ready fur another set-to with Moccasin; but death tripped 'im, an' he went down ag'in. One night Old Shady called me to 'im an' said that he had his last check in his hand, an' war about to pass it in. It war one ov the wildest nights you ever saw, boy. My shanty war near the river, which roared like a thousand fiends howlin' for Old Shady's soul. For ten minutes he sat up in bed starin' at me, an' listenin' to the river at the same time; but at last he said: 'Tornado, I'll never git back thar!'

"Back whar, Shady?" said I.

"Back to the old mine—back to the boss bonanza ov the West."

"Then he reached under the pillow and pulled out one ov his boots and handed it to me.

"Pry up the sole," he said.

"I looked at 'im, but his eye war cl'ar; thar warn't the least sign of insanity in it. So I took my knife an' loosened the sole of his boot. Jehu! how he watched me, an' all at once he made a dart fur it an' held a piece ov dirty paper in his hand. Then I held the lig'l t close to 'im, an' he tried to explain the meanin' ov the rough lines on the paper. Thar war a lost gold-mine somewhar in these parts; but Old Shady, accordin' to his tell, had found it, an' that ar' paper war a map ov the diggin's. I didn't lose a word ov his talk; but I heard every syllable, an' got all them lines fixed right in my noggin. He gave the mine to me, fur it belonged to him by right of re-discovery. Then he went right off into some crazy lingo, an' when mornin' come, thar he lay ready fur the coolin' board. I didn't say anything to the boys about his death, but buried him myself—"

"What! Tornado, you do not mean to say that you once buried the man that you shot back there in the cave?" exclaimed the young listener, as he grasped Tornado's arm.

"Thet's jest what I did!" was the answer, and the gray eyes glittered. "I knowed thet voice ez soon ez I heard it, an' I can't tell you what kind ov feelin's went over me. Mebbe he warn't dead when I planted 'im; he might hev been in some kind ov trance, but he's dead now. No foolin' this time, boy."

"But thar's another thing thet puzzles me,"

said the old fellow, after a lengthy pause. "Whar did Injun Jack hear about the bonanza?"

"He might have met Old Shady after his resurrection."

"He must hev done it. Now we ar' on our pins ag'in. You know whar the bonanza is. How did you discover it?"

Tornado Jr. started back with a light cry and stared into his protector's face.

"Who told you that I had found it?" he asked.

"You yourself. Hev you forgottin so soon? Why, it hasn't been three hours since you surprised me in the cave, an' said that you war goin' to be the money king, an' thet Tornado Tom could go back to Omaha poor ez he left it. No, you hav'n't forgottin. Whar is the mine?"

The hand of Tornado had suddenly closed about the boy's arm.

"Whar is it?" he repeated fiercely, and then his look softened. "We needn't be foes. We come out hyar pards, an' we ought to go back the same. I don't want a dollar outen the boss bonanza. It shall all be yours. I said so to myself when I started over the Bitter Root Range, with you follerin' an' wonderin' at my side. Don't act the blamed fool now, Tornado. You hev found the gold; it is all yours. Now whar is it?"

"I will play fair with you," was the answer. "You have just saved my life. I will show you that wonderful gold-mine which, knowing nothing about the existence of that map, I discovered accidentally."

How old Tornado's eyes glittered!

"At last!" he cried. "We will outwit all them devils what Old Shady hes led into this kentry; yes, an' Injun Jack, too!"

"Especially Injun Jack!" repeated the boy, madly.

"Is it far from hyar—the mine? Kin we reach it to-night?" asked Tom, eagerly.

"Before morning we can be in it!" was the answer. "But since you have mentioned Injun Jack, do you know who came out here with him?"

Tornado Tom started at the question, and a cloud overspread his face.

"A'n't he alone?" he asked in a tone that deceived the boy.

"No! there is a young girl with him, a creature as pretty as the morning—a girl with large eyes as blue as the sky, and such hair! Oh, Tornado, if you could but see her."

"Then you've seen her?"

"A glimpse, that was all. I owe her a life, and I went to thank her when—"

The boy paused. Why should he tell Tom about the oath which Injun Jack had forced from him?"

"Wal, go on," said Tornado, becoming interested.

"I did not get to thank her. Circumstances prevented."

"An' them sarcumstances war Injun Jack, boy."

"What do you know about it?" cried the youth.

"Nothin', I only guessed."

"Yes, he did interfere!" cried Tornado Jr. fiercely. "He made me swear never to speak to the girl who saved my life, not even to save her from peril when I could."

"That war all right!" blurted Tom.

"Right?" echoed the boy. "Are you in earnest, Tom?"

"Why not? Injun Jack would give all the gold to her ef he found it first. She wants it, too, fur she wants to go back to the States a gold-queen, while you an' me, boy, kin git back, or die hyar, poor ez Lazarus, jest ez it suits us. She didn't know who she war savin' when she helped you, or never a trigger would she hev pulled. Let 'er go!"

"I can't."

"You must!"

The boy stepped proudly back. "I am oath-bound, I know; but I care not for that!" he cried. "I am going to have my way in some matters. In that wonderful mine is gold enough to make millionaires of all of us. I am willing to divide equally with the girl, nay I will give her more than half for she saved my life. I am ready to meet Injun Jack and to tell him that I will not keep that infamous oath—that I am going to see the girl he pretends to protect. He shall not keep us apart. When I have settled accounts with him, I will turn my attention to the Gold League. But the girl first!"

An instant later the flash of a revolver almost blinded the boy, and with the loud report he threw up his hands and reeled away. Tornado turned, and the next instant sent a bullet after the figure which his eyes saw for a moment.

There was no reply to the second shot, and Tom directed his attention to the youthful figure on the rocky ground.

If he had walked a few rods in the direction he had fired he would have seen the figure of a man lying among the stones.

After awhile that figure moved, arose and walked slowly away.

A few hundred yards on the man stopped, and leaned against a large rock.

Daylight which appeared soon afterward found him still there, and the beams of morning revealed the white, but handsome face of Injun Jack.

"I've settled the boy!" he said fiercely and in a tone of triumph. "His oath was broken as much as if he had met Queen Olive. I will find the girl, for your accursed bullet, Tornado, went too far to the left. I am living still for all my enemies, the Gold League, Injuns—all! By Jove! Injun Jack, you'll yet see the gold-bugs of the States bow before the Gold Queen of Idaho!"

He left the rock, but, though he tottered at first, his gait soon became steady, and when he entered the canyon not far off, Injun Jack from Red Core seemed himself again.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE END OF A ROPE.

"Is he dead?"

This question fell at the same time from a dozen tongues.

"Dead? Look at 'im!"

The torch which old Tornado had dashed to

the floor of the cave and extinguished by a stamp had been relighted by the startled Brethren who now gazed into the face from which a mask had been lifted.

It was the face of a man hardened by crime; the tight-shut lips were those of a desperado; in short, the chief of the League, Old Shady, the man once buried, lay before his followers, dead!

Tornado Tom had not shot at random. From a hole in the center of the leader's forehead a little blood was oozing, and instead of springing up and hunting the slayer the members of the Brotherhood stared in silence at the ghastly spectacle.

"The boss wanted it the other way," said one of the men addressing his companions.

"Of course!" was the response. "Tornado Tom, arter he got the map, chucked Old Shady under the ground ez quickly ez possible. It should hev been the other way; but Tornado got the drop on the boss an' kept it."

"Woe to us ef he gits it on our brain-pans."

"Who said that?"

Every eye was turned in the direction from which the lamentation had come.

"Who's afeard ov Tornado?"

"Nobody," said the same voice. "But we mustn't let him git the drop on us like the boss did. That's what I meant."

"Oh!" was the exclamation of relief. "He's dropped his last brother of the bowie. Let us plant the boss an' then hunt him down."

The proposition was acted upon at once, and when the living members of the League left the cave, it might have been noticed that one man carried two rifles and double his complement of revolvers.

Old Shady had been left behind.

Somewhere in the cave he had found sepulture.

Not long afterward and in the light of the early dawn these same men came suddenly upon a scene that caused them to draw rein. It was a scene wholly unexpected—a fair young girl standing in the midst of a group of Indians, and right before one who held over her the long-bladed knife of the Idaho brave.

A moment and the Brotherhood was ready.

"Fire!" stirred the folds of one of the masks, and the natives fell headlong in every direction.

A few escaped, among them a supple young warrior, who was seen to carry off with him the girl over whom the knife had been raised.

"By Jove! Injun Jack's sweetheart!" exclaimed one of the band, who had witnessed the Indian's act.

"The gal they war goin' to fight fur? Not much, she warn't. Salvo, you hev lost yer eyes."

"Never!" exclaimed Salvo, nettled at the reply he had received. "Thet war Injun Jack's gal. My share in the boss bonanza ag'in' a knife that it war."

"Pshaw! it war an Injun gal!"

"Bet if you dare! Cowards!" hissed Salvo, whose flashing eyes showed that he was mad.

"Hyar's the knife ef you will bet, an' I'll add my share to it. Now we'll go down an' see."

And with a laugh at Salvo's expense, the entire party rode from the spot.

An hour later they came in sight of Red Core, silent and apparently untenanted.

But deep in the mountain forest they drew rein and examined the premises.

"The bird would be out this pretty mornin' ef she war at home," suddenly broke forth the mask Salvo. "I guess I'll take knife and share!"

"Not yet," was the reply. "Wait till we decide."

After a lengthy inspection, which was not wholly satisfactory to the new leader of the Brethren, the whole troop rode slowly toward the cabin and halted before the door.

Salvo leaned from his horse and knocked with the butt of his Winchester, then drew back into line again and waited.

"The nest is empty!" he said a minute later. "The Injuns robbed it last night, an' ef we had chased that young buck, we would hev had the young fairy afore this."

A moment later the captain of the League leaped to the ground and dashing forward, kicked the door with his heavily-booted foot.

It instantly flew open.

"I told you so," reiterated Salvo.

"Let's ransack the ranch," sounded on every side.

"After a lot ov Idahoes had gutted it? You'd get a world of booty, I'm thinkin'! We've no business hyar. We war fools fur not followin' the Injun who set the dogs on us. He's the same Greaser whose trail we have mysteriously lost twenty times. I stick to what I allus said: That young buck knows whar the boss bonanza is."

"Then fur the Injun!"

"Thet's the doctrine. Right about!"

Once more the backs of the gray masks were turned upon Red Core and away they went.

But almost abruptly the entire party stopped not far away and every face was covered.

What had caused the halt?

A man who appeared to be alone was seated at a spring—engaged in dressing, as well as he was able, a wound in or near the shoulder.

"Injun Jack! Somebody's winged 'im!" passed from lip to lip.

It was the man from Red Core.

"Cover him," commanded the head of the Brethren. "Now, you'll see a tiger neatly caught."

The following minute a loud halloo came from beneath a mask half-lifted.

Injun Jack was on his feet in an instant, a revolver in his right hand, and the next second he looked at his foes.

His eyes emitted gleams of rage as he gazed, and his breast heaved with illy-subdued excitement.

"I'm caught this time—caught when I'm not more than half a man!" he muttered.

"We've got the drop on you this time, Jack," came over the leveled rifles. "Come up and get acquainted."

Without a moment's hesitation the man from Red Core walked boldly toward the League, his eagle eye clear and calm as ever.

"Halt!"

He stopped not twenty feet from the horses' heads and under the very muzzles of the carbines.

"Winged, eh? Who did that, Injun?" laughed the chief, looking at the wound hardly half-dressed.

"An enemy of mine," and then Jack waved his hand along the line. "What do you want with me? I heard you were at Red Core to see me, but I was not at home."

"We war," was the answer. "Injun Jack, we don't want to hurt you, for some ov us was at the Yellowstone Forks when you sailed in and saved the women an' children in the wagon-train. But we are goin' to have this ground to ourselves, even if we have to resort to violent measures. Which would you rather do: Leave Idaho or hang? It's a plain way ov puttin' the matter, but as you wouldn't beat round the bush ef you war us, so we'll deal squar' with you—no jacks up our sleeves in this game."

Injun Jack listened without the quiver of a muscle.

"You wouldn't give me a show!" he asked.

"With that revolver? No! We've seen you handle it afore, at least some ov us hev."

"Then you sha'n't drive me from Idaho!" fell resolutely from his lips. "Though robbed and shot, I'm still Injun Jack!"

If the Gold League were quick their aim did not prevent the lifting of Injun Jack's pistol, but as one of the masks pitched headlong from the saddle, the man from Red Core fell forward through the smoke of his own weapon!

All this was the bloody work of a second.

The mask lay on the ground motionless, but Injun Jack almost immediately arose to have a dozen human tigers throw themselves upon him, with oaths of mingled madness and delight.

"You'll be hanged yet," was hissed in his ears. "This doesn't look much like the boss bonanza, whose secret you wormed from Old Shady. We know whar the rocks are; we've found the mine, an'—"

Injun Jack, who had been looking searchingly into the speaker's eyes, interrupted him with one word:

"Liar!"

Then a hand armed with a revolver was lifted against him, but it was quickly jerked down.

"Don't spoil the hangin'!" accompanied the interference.

A few moments later the man from Red Core stood under the stout limb of a handy tree. A rope had already been thrown over it, and the hands of one of the masks were making the deadly noose.

"Are you ready, Injun?"

"I am always ready!" was the prompt response.

The noose fell over the victim's head, and the man who had fashioned it stepped forward to complete the adjustment.

Already four men held the other end of the cord.

Injun Jack felt the draw of the infernal rope, but at the same time he heard a whisper at his ear.

"Inflate yer lungs an' brace every nerve in yer body, an' you'll be worth twenty dead men to-morrow. I'm yer friend. I saw you at Yellowstone Forks an' I owe you suthin'!"

The next instant "Pull!" rung from the leader's lips and the body of Injun Jack was dangling 'twixt heaven and earth.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HOODWINKED INDIAN.

QUEEN OLIVE started, and a thrill shot through her heart when Buck Tail laid the gold stone in her hands.

"All like that!" exclaimed the Idaho. "All b'long to white girl, too."

The girl did not seem to hear him; she was weighing the heavy rock on her palm, and a thousand thoughts were chasing one another through her brain.

"Gold rock make girl dumb!" ejaculated the impatient Indian. "Her no talk to Buck Tail; rock steal her tongue."

The Indian's hand grasped Olive's arm. She started back, and the gold rock almost slid from her hands.

"White girl know Buck Tail's secret now. What she think of it?"

"Your discovery is wonderful; but others may have found it as well as yourself."

"Others hunt for it. The men who hide their faces track Buck Tail a long time, just as if they think him know where the gold rocks shine; but him always outwit them. They never trail him here, for him knows all the ways of the fox!"

The Indian's eyes glittered triumphantly while he spoke.

Olive felt her heart in her throat when he mentioned the Gold League.

They then suspected the young Idaho; but he had eluded them. This was good news. A few hours more, she resolved to herself, and Indian Jack would know where the boss bonanza was.

"Yes, Buck Tail fool the White Hoods," continued the Indian. "Nobody never knows his secret, but his pretty pale-faced squaw. Is she not rich? She will be the Gold Queen of the Idahoos. But she does not smile."

"I cannot take this gold with me," said Olive.

"But girl come an' look at it whenever she want."

"Then I am not to live here?"

"No! no!" and the Indian opened his eyes with astonishment. "Girl go live with Buck Tail where the lodges of his people make one big village. Big marriage feast, one—two hundred dogs killed, an' all braves called in from the war-path. Heap big time. Buck Tail will forget his dogs when him look into the eyes of his gold girl. Girl ready for the feast?"

A sudden inspiration seemed to take possession of Olive.

"When is all this to take place? When do you propose to make me your queen?"

"Whenever white girl ready. Now, if she say so."

"In the village of your people—not elsewhere?"

"In the great village," replied Buck Tail.

"When can we get there?"

"By the time the sun goes down."

"You cannot carry me well on your horse,"

"Oh, Buck Tail find more'n one horse." Queen Olive's eyes had an intense sparkle.

"Then let us go. The gold is to be mine, every rock of it, you say?"

"All! all!"

The Indian was now terribly excited. The gift of the mine had put a climax to his short wooing, and he would soon appear in the great village of the Idahos with something which not one of his nation possessed—a wife whose skin was white, and whose eyes were blue.

"Girl come with Buck Tail," he cried, seizing Olive's hand. "Him take her to the village now."

Controlling her emotion Olive allowed herself to be conducted from the gold chamber, and they were soon gradually ascending a path the loose stones of which our heroine fondly believed nuggets of gold.

Her heart beat faster than ever when her eyes caught a gleam of light far ahead, and the next moment after admonishing her to remain still her red conductor glided off.

Not long afterward her ears were greeted by the neighs of a horse, and Buck Tail reappeared.

"Nobody watchin'. Trail safe to the big village."

At the mouth of the mine Olive saw two horses evidently fresh, and almost before she had finished contemplating them she was helped to the back of one, and buffalo-hide reins thrust into her hands.

"Horses fast!" said the young Indian who had leaped to the saddle with the agility of a finished rider. "White girl come back to gold mine by 'm by—come back as Buck Tail's wife."

The next moment Olive passed from darkness into the light which for a second dazzled her eyes. They fronted a narrow pass, the one by which they had reached the mine. Olive had photographed it on her mind! She fondly thought that the time would come when, pointing to it, she could say proudly to Injun Jack: "See! that pass leads us to the end of our hunt."

The pair were well mounted, but Olive felt entirely satisfied with her steed after comparing it with the one the Idaho bestrode.

"I have the best horse. I could outstrip Buck Tail," she thought.

They halted side by side for a moment just beyond the mouth of the gold cave. Buck Tail seemed to be debating some mental proposition, for his eyes alternated strangely between his captive and the narrow path.

"Buck Tail better go ahead," he said at length. "White girl foller close behind. Keep eye on Buck Tail, stop when him stops, an'—"

The young Indian did not get to finish the instructions, for Olive's hand had darted at his belt, and the next instant with a countenance blanched by terror, he recoiled from the muzzle of his own revolver!

The girl's eyes were emitting sparks of fire as it seemed, and Buck Tail was still shrinking from the leveled firearm.

"When I marry you, Buck Tail, we will have the dog-feast!" hissed Queen Olive in sarcastic tones over the pistol. "But that time will never come! Down! leave your saddle—this instant, or I'll bore your skull! Were you fool enough

to think that Injun Jack's girl would ride quietly to your red capital after you had shown her the boss bonanza? Come! off! off! or I'll drop you!"

The girl's arm seemed to lengthen, the revolver was thrust a few inches nearer his face, and the Idaho buck rolled suddenly from his horse, and in such a ludicrous manner, that Olive could not repress a smile.

With the exception of his knife, Buck Tail was completely unarmed and that weapon would do him no good.

"Now, Buck Tail, my best regards till we meet again, if ever!" cried Queen Olive tauntingly. "Good-by! You follow me at your peril, for I have the best arms in this contest," and she held the revolver before his mad and covetous gaze.

The Indian had not spoken since the capture of his pistol; the turning of the tables seemed to have rendered him speechless.

But when Olive's horse gave a great bound and went down the path like a rocket, a groan and then a mad cry fell from his lips, and he leaped to saddle again.

"Buck Tail get fooled in white girl; but him catch 'er yet, an' dog-feast go on all same."

But the gray steed that bore the Queen of Red Core had already disappeared, and when Buck Tail reached the termination of the path he looked on every side but saw nothing of the fugitive.

Then the young Indian gave vent to his indignation, and cursed the folly which had prompted him to give the girl such an opportunity for escape. He did not reflect that the truth of the matter was that the arts of Queen Olive had completely hoodwinked him, and that, owing to his own credulity, she was now riding away with the secret of the wonderful gold mine in her possession.

Olive allowed the well-mettled steed free rein, until she was confident that she was not pursued. Then she held him in and at last had him under her control.

"An easier victory than I expected," she said. "The revolver was loose just as if to help me, and it frightened the Injun almost out of his wits, too. Where am I now?"

She looked around only to utter a cry of mingled surprise and joy.

"What! so near Red Core! It cannot be, and yet there is the familiar landmark of the bald mountain. Fortune is determined to favor me."

Indeed, thus it seemed, for urging her horse forward again, and deviating a little to the right, her eyes soon beheld the familiar cabin in the valley.

At home once more!

The sight inspired Queen Olive with such eagerness that she did not think of incurring a new danger by rushing incautiously to the hut, and she hurried forward.

"Jack! Jack! I have found the big bonanza!" she was saying aloud, and still repeating the words in her glee, she halted before the door and threw herself from the horse.

The little door already stood ajar, and the next moment Olive threw herself into the house

But all at once she recoiled across the threshold with a chilling cry of terror, and with a face blanched to the hue of a shroud.

For, stretched at full length on the rough flooring, lay the body of a man!

The face was partly turned toward the door, and after a moment of speechless quivering, Queen Olive darted forward again and threw herself upon it.

"Jack! Jack! who did this? Speak! and tell me, that I may hunt them down. It is the work of the Gold League. I know it, and I will have revenge!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BOSS BONANZA AT LAST.

LET us go back to Tornado Tom and his *protege*.

We have seen how fast upon the boy's renunciation of his oath followed the pistol-shot that sent him staggering from Tornado with a startling cry, and how quickly the gaunt old human tiger wheeled and fired at the dim figure of the slayer.

Tornado's weapon had scarcely cracked before he was bending over the young member of the Gold League.

"Jehu! it war a narrer escape!" he exclaimed, as he withdrew his hand from the youth's head and found it covered with blood. "The man what fired war mad; he did not hold his weepin' steady. If he had, Tornado, the bullet wouldn't be out thar on the ground, but somewhar in yer brain-box."

There was truth in Tom's observations. Fortunately the bullet intended for the boy's brain had merely plowed a bloody furrow under the scalp to come out at last, and carry off a lock of hair. This was all.

"We'll find the boss bonanza yet!" said the old fellow to himself, and then he went to work to restore his *protege* to consciousness.

When he succeeded, when Tornado Jr. opened his eyes and spoke, the tawny tiger uttered a cry of satisfaction.

"He missed the bull's-eye by a hair, but a miss is ez good ez a mile! Now let us start anew."

All the while Tornado was fixing a bandage about the bleeding head, and the boy was standing erect, but still somewhat bewildered.

"Start anew? whither?"

"To the boss bonanza—the mine! Don't you know?"

"Oh, yes!" cried the boy, starting as light seemed to break suddenly upon him. "The mine—yes! yes. Come, Tornado, I will show you its wealth, and then for our old foes."

"Hold on," said Tom, holding back as he smiled at the youth's eagerness. "Git yer bearings first. Thet bullet kinder upset ye. Don't budge till everything comes back squar' to ye."

These words had the desired effect, and Tornado saw the youth study the lofty hills that rose on every side.

"He's comin' to it. When he starts ag'in it will be in the right direction."

All at once Tornado Jr. sprung forward; he had found his bearings once more.

The tall adventurer eagerly followed him, and

notwithstanding his lengthy strides he was scarcely able to keep alongside.

"How came *you* to find it?" he asked.

"I followed the Indian."

"What Injun?"

The young Idaho who lately had two dogs. I encountered him by accident while he was eluding the League, and while he slipped away from them he kept in my sight."

"An' he hid in the gold-mine?"

"He did."

"He may be thar now."

"That is quite likely."

"Wal, I wouldn't mind that. He wouldn't be a mouthful fur us."

On, on, went the two partners, and Tornado was beginning to lament the distance, when the boy came to a sudden halt.

Then he turned quickly upon Tom and exhibited a countenance so wild and unnatural that the old fellow actually shrank back with a cry of lost hope.

"Great Jehu! the youngster's gone mad!" fell in startling accents from his lips. "Thet bullet got in its work on his brain, ef it didn't smash the boxin'."

For several moments Tornado Jr. stared wolfishly at his protector; then a wild cry pealed from his throat and his hands were soon tearing the bandage from his head.

Tornado sprung forward to prevent; but the bloody cloth was being trampled under the boy's feet before he could touch him, and it was with difficulty that he held him.

"Hyar's a go!" thought Tom to himself. "Just when the sky ar' gettin' cl'ar a thunder-storm comes up an' plays hob with everything. Now the boss bonanza hes gone a-shimmerin'. Cuss thet bullet! Injun Jack, we'll fight the next time we meet, compact er not!"

After the paroxysm of madness had partly passed away, Tornado Tom held the limp and unconscious body of his little partner in his arms.

Daylight found him going up the mountain with his burden, never halting for a moment with the load, nor drawing a single breath of fatigue.

The sun came up, but Tom went on, now through a darkened gap, and now along the timbered side of a mountain pass.

Was he going back to the cave?

All at once Tornado halted and laid the boy gently down.

Then stepping astride of the body, he drew his revolvers and fastened a pair of flashing eyes on the mouth of the narrow gulch which he would have left in another moment.

"I've got the advantage this time," he murmured. "Two can't ride abreast hyar. I didn't expect to meet 'im, but things ar' comin' to a head, an' we've got to fight it out somewhar, so why not right hyar?"

A moment later, and the head of a horse came in sight, then the burly figure of his rider, a wild fellow whose head-dress was a flaring red handkerchief.

"They haven't got the hoods on this time. I've caught 'em unmasked. Now I kin see exactly whar to shoot."

Then the word "halt!" rung out, and as the

horseman suddenly drew rein, a revolver spoke and he fell quivering back in his saddle, and in the agonies of death.

"One!" muttered Tornado, and a second shot stretched the horse across the narrow pass, completely blocking it.

At that moment another head showed itself, but it suddenly fell forward, and two men lay dead together!

"I'm the concentrated essence ov destruction. You hev kicked the gantlet into my face, an' I take pleasure in shootin' it back at you, you cowardly gray-hooded skunks! Come out, an' let's settle accounts hyar—settle 'em forever!"

But there was no reply, save the quick galloping of several horses which swiftly grew less distinct.

"Cowards!" exclaimed Tornado, as he leaped forward. "That's right! Run off and plot some new devilment. Wal, it wasn't such a bad beginnin' arter all. Two shots an' two Hoods. Bless me! ef they arn't the Yellowstone boys!"

The bronzed victor was staring at the faces of his enemies.

"Old Shady went back thar first an' collected 'em," he went on. "I hed his map, an' that's why he's lost his bearin's. The map would hev found the bonanza fur 'em long ago. Without it they've been disapp'nted. Now I begin to see through the hull thing. They'll hunt me, thinkin' that I've got the map, but they're mistakin'. Wal, hunt old Tornado all you please, my daisies, but jest keep out o' range. Two ov ye got a leetle too close this mornin'."

A groan behind him made the old fellow turn, and he saw his *protege* standing up.

"All right ag'in! I see it in his eye!" cried the gold-hunter, as he sprung to the boy's side.

"We had a scrimmage, boy!" exclaimed Tornado, pointing to the little battle-field. "They came on me kind o' sudden, so I jest laid you down an' guv 'em the best I hed in the shop. The rest—they're somewhar 'twixt hyar an' Bitter Root, ef their hosses hevn't guv out. But what's the matter now? What is it?—more enemies fur us to wrestle with?"

"No, not that, but something better than foes. Tornado, look yonder, up there where the big rocks seem ready to tumble down upon us, and tell me what you see."

Tornado Jr. had seized the old hunter's arm, and was pointing excitedly up the mountain.

"I see nuthin' but rocks!" answered Tom, doubting the little speaker's sanity. "Nuthin' but rocks!" he repeated.

"Then follow me and I'll show you. I'm not mad now. While I was unconscious, fate must have directed your footsteps."

Favored with unnatural strength, the boy darted away, followed by Tornado.

"Mad ez a March hare! The boss bonanza ar' gettin' further an' further away all the time," he ill-humoredly muttered.

When the youth stopped it was to whirl upon Tornado Tom with a face illumined with triumph.

"We are here! Go in!" he cried.

"In whar?"

With a laugh Tornado Jr. bounded forward

again and with one jerk brought a mass of monntain vines from their rocky soil.

The mouth of what appeared to be a cavern in the mountain was thus laid bare.

"The boss bonanza!" said the boy. "Go in."

Tornado Tom needed no further urging.

A great bound took him beyond the threshold, and as he paused in the darkness a cry from his *protege* saluted his ears.

"Pish! he's only fainted," he said, as he picked up Tornado Jr.'s body lying inanimate at the mouth of the cavern. "One can afford to faint when he knows that he'll see millions when he opens his eyes ag'in. We've got to the end of our string at last. The big bonanza is yours, boy! Thar ain't power enough in the arms ov mankind to wrest it from you!"

The eyes of Tornado Tom fairly blazed with delight, and in the defiance of the moment he smote the stone walls about him with his fists.

CHAPTER XVII.

FIGHTING FOR THE PRIZE.

OLD TORNADO had spoken truth when he said that the boy Gold Leaguer had only fainted.

But it was the long swoon born of exhaustion, and when the hunter turned from smiting the walls of the cavern and swearing that no power should wrest the gold-mine from them, it was to find Tornado Jr. motionless still.

"It ar' his'n—all his'n!" he cried, looking proudly at the boy, whose face was revealed by a ray of sunshine that had entered the place. "The old map didn't do me any good arter all. It hez helped nobody. An' to think that the young 'un should find the bonanza by trackin' a skulkin' red-skin! Now it more'n belongs to him. He found it! he owns it! an' in death shall fall the arm that tries to take it from 'im!"

He picked the boy up and started down the passage, with the unreal delight of a madman.

Every now and then an oath or a cry of victory fell from his lips; he could not keep the great triumph to himself.

What if the experience of the dungeon-cave should be repeated? What if he should step into space and go down—down to death through the gloom, and that with the precious burden in his arms?

The man did not think of such probabilities.

He continued on until he was compelled to halt by the barrier of a wall.

"Thunders!" he cried, shrinking away. "Old Tornado, ye'r' at the end of the lane. Now fur a light."

A search among his pockets brought to light one of the luxuries of the States—a lucifer match.

The next instant a flicker of flame dissipated a small portion of the gloom. The match did not burn long, but it revealed an object at which Tornado sprung like a tiger—a coarse-looking rock at his feet.

"Jehu! we've struck it!" rung through the cave. "Ten thousand to the ton an' more! Old Shady didn't lie. Who would stay dead long when he knew that this kentry held such a bonanza as this one? Whoop-la! my gold-bug.

Look at this nuggets an' behold yer millions already mined an', I might almost say coined!"

Tornado Jr. revived slowly and his eyes sparkled when they fell upon the pile of rocks that his protector had scraped together.

"Yes, we're all right when we hev nobody to dispute possession with us," he said, looking into Tornado's ecstasy-illuminated face. "Do not forget that the young Indian knows the secret of the mine, that the Brotherhood are hunting him, and that Injun Jack crossed the Bitter Root Hills for the sole purpose of laying his hands on this ore."

"I wish they'd all come hyar at once an' claim it. I wish they war hyar now."

"All! That includes the girl."

Tornado threw a look of reproof at the boy, but his lips did not frame one.

"Gold-bugs never marry beggars. I'll fix that," he was thinking.

"Let us explore the bonanza," said the boy. "I am strong again. I want to know the extent of our find."

Tom caught eagerly at the suggestion, and a torch was improvised.

But just as the trapper was about to apply a lucifer to his invention the boy caught his wrist, and cried:

"Your wish is coming true. As I hope for Heaven, I believe they are coming. Did you not hear?"

"Hear? No!"

"Stand perfectly still and listen. Turn your head and strain your ears. You had better put out the match, too."

The tawny right hand of the gold-hunter smothered the incipient flame, and the twain listened.

"My accursed comrades! I knew it," said the boy, hardly above his breath.

Then these words fell upon their ears:

"Keep the knife at the Greaser's windpipe! We've struck the boss bonanza. Hold him tight thar, Sandy. By George! I allus said that to ketch the Injun war to find the gold!"

Tornado Jr. felt a hand tighten at his wrist while the words were wafted to them.

"Yes," he said, replying to the gripe. "They have caught the Indian whom I watched, and they are forcing him to reveal the secrets of the old mine, with a knife at his throat. And besides, Tornado, we have entrapped ourselves."

"Mebbe we hev. Yonder is their torch."

"Where?"

"Away up there. It looks like a star, but ez true ez I live, it is their light."

The boy's eyes caught the far-off glitter.

"Shall we fight them here?" he queried.

"No. Let me keep yer wrist. Come on. We will meet 'em half-way."

The gold-hunters started toward the glimmering torch, Tornado in the lead, with the steel gripe of his right hand at the boy's wrist.

At times the torch would vanish, but it would soon reappear more brilliant than ever, because it was coming toward them.

"Hyar we fight 'em!" old Tornado said, halting suddenly. "I've been feelin' fur this spot all along. I felt it ez we came in. Thar seems to be a room in each side ov the wall. Now,

git ready. We've got to write our title cl'ar to the mine right hyar."

Side by side in the niche-like place to which they had withdrawn man and boy waited for their foes.

They felt that it would be their last tussle with the Hooded Brethren.

"They have stopped," said the impatient boy.

"The Injun must be stubborn, but the bowie is still at his throat, I'll warrant ye. They hed halted, but they're comin' on ag'in. I should say that they hed the red-skin foul!"

"Can you see?"

"The torch helps me. Thar! they hev stopped ag'in. The Injun ar' goin' to show grit. Listen!"

"We can't be stoppin' every minute!" growled a rough voice. "Hyar! I'll settle the matter. What ar' you goin' to do, Injun? Go on or die?"

"Buck Tail will stand where he is. The men with the hidden faces cannot make him put another moccasin forward."

"Wal, fool, we'll dissolve pardnership!"

A half-stifled cry followed.

"We kin find it ourselves, boys. The yaller rock ar'n't fur off; we need no Injun to show us the way, any more. By the fiends of chaos! the Brethren ov the Gold League hev found the lost gold mine ov Idaho!"

Shouts of applause responded to this cry of victory and the boy heard old Tornado say:

"They've wiped yer Injun out. His windpipe isn't worth a nickel. Hyar, step out an' stoop. When I say 'fire!' open yer battery on the Hoods."

"I am ready. Now I shall pay them back for the brand of the bowie."

The twain had stepped from the niche, and were crouching with fingers at their triggers.

Of course they were holding their breath, for in another second the battle would open.

But all at once something brushed old Tornado's arm, and he saw a dark figure spring in between him and the advancing torch.

"I have the best right to the first shot!" hissed a new voice. "I'll kill the man who attempts to deprive me of it. Those devils yonder had the pleasure of pulling me up to a limb not long ago. I want to show them that men don't always die jest because they are hanged."

Then his voice rung out loud and clear:

"Halt! Gentlemen of the white masks, receive the compliments of Injun Jack from Red Core!"

As he finished, his right hand went up, and he began pouring death against the ranks of the Gray Hoods of Idaho.

"Thunders! Injun Jack, we're with you!" cried old Tornado, springing to the slayer's side.

"Yes, you kin sail in now!" was the response, and two more revolvers began to take part in the battle.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GOLD LEAGUE'S EXIT.

The appearance of Injun Jack in the cave was totally unexpected by old Tom and his young partner.

Where had he come from?

Let us pause here a moment and see.

We saw the Brotherhood pull him up to a bough, and then gallop off leaving him behind to perish at the end of a rope.

But Injun Jack was not to die thus.

The words whispered into his ears just before he was jerked upward saved his life.

He did not bother himself about the identity of his self-announced friend among the masks, but inflated his lungs and braced his nerves as the voice had directed.

He speedily found that the helping hand had adjusted the rope with an eye single to his preservation. Nor was that all. His hands had been tied by that same hand, and a little exertion sufficed to free them.

He waited until the masked executioners had passed out of sight, until they had placed a mountain between them and the gallows-tree.

Then his right hand seized the rope above his head, and while he lifted himself up, his left hand freed his throat and an empty noose dangled from the limb.

A wild cry of joy and future vengeance proclaimed his liberation. Taking the noose in his hands, he pinned it against the tree with his bowie, which the League had left at his feet, then once more he turned his face toward Red Core.

His wound wrenched open by the jerk from the ground almost drove him mad; but he kept back the groans of pain which the occasion demanded, until he crossed the cabin threshold.

There endurance found its end, for the brave man fell down like a dead hero, and was still lying on the floor when Queen Olive, having escaped from Buck Tail, arrived with heart and head full of the golden prize found at last.

The scene that followed her arrival has been already chronicled.

Under the magic influence of her tears and kisses life came back to the man from Red Core, and not long afterward he was listening to the girl's wonderful story of her adventures.

"And are you sure you have found the boss bonanza, Queen?"

"My eyes did not deceive me, and yet it seems more than half a dream."

"Then let us go at once. Olive, you must not miss the way."

"Miss the way to that mine of riches? I know every rock, tree, and tuft of grass between it and Red Core."

"Then I am ready."

Injun Jack once more stood erect.

Other hands than his had washed his wound and dressed it, and as he stood before the girl she saw that the gold fever was devouring his very heart-strings.

"Didn't I say that you should be the richest woman in the States?" he cried. "Why, the handsome lords of creation will be bowing to you before you are two days in the big cities. The papers will talk of nothing but the Gold Queen of Idaho, and now and then they'll put in a word about Jack, her friend. It is all yours. I said it should be, and I guess I have kept my word! Now let us go. Lead the way, my Queen of Gold."

We need not follow Injun Jack to the prize for which he had hunted. We already know

that he got there, and we have seen how, stepping before old Tornado and his *protege*, he opened the battle with the mountain masks.

The rapid firing, coupled to the voice of the man whom they had lately hanged, threw the band into great confusion.

"Put out the torches! They only show us to the enemy!" was the cry.

But there were two torches which could not be extinguished. They had fallen from their bearers' hands, and were flaring on the floor of the corridor, midway between the combatants.

When the masks began to return the fire, the peal of firearms was incessant.

All parties had reached their goal, and it was evident that the battle now going on would be fought to the bitter end.

The Gold League at least was determined on this score. Had they not taken an oath that, once in the gold mine, no power should drive them out?

Therefore, they fought like tigers, and bullet passed bullet in the heavy smoke that filled the passage.

"Stand firm, brethren! We outnumber the enemy ten to one."

These words had encouraged the band, but why did the shots from that very enemy continue to increase instead of diminish?

A reinforcement had been added to the ranks of the trio.

Little Tornado heard a voice at his elbow, and then a new pistol joined its rapid shots to the noises of the battle.

Turning his head, he caught a glimpse of a girl at his side.

They had met at last! Already he had broken his oath.

"What! you here?" fell from the boy's lips.

"Why not? Never mind; I will divide with you."

"Tornado Jr. could hardly repress a smile.

A short time before he had talked of dividing with her!

But he did not get to reply, for the figure of Injun Jack fell between them and they were rudely forced apart.

"Remember your oath!" was hissed fiercely into the youth's ears, as Injun Jack again turned his attention to the common foe.

Almost suddenly the firing ceased on the part of the Gold League.

"The cowards give it up," announced Tornado. "Now, Injun, you an' me fur it, I guess."

"Wait until we see," was the response.

The little party now advanced firing, but no reply was obtained.

The sight that greeted their eyes on the spot where the Brotherhood had fought was horrible in the extreme.

Everywhere lay the Gray Hoods of Idaho; they had fallen on every side.

"We're all hyar, Injun Jack!" said a voice from beneath a mask. "You an' yer pard hev the boss bonanza all to yerselves. We didn't expect to see you turn the jack on us arter we had treated you to a rope an' a limb. Our oath hez been kept, anyway. We die in the mine. Injun, ef you an' yer pards hedn't got the drop on us, the Brand ov the Bowie would hev come out on top."

Thirteen human figures lay within the little compass of that underground battle-field.

The Brotherhood which had tracked and killed for the prize of the mountains was extinct, and the mark of the organization remained on only one living breast—the boy's.

"Ar' ye ready, Injun?" demanded old Tornado, suddenly laying his hand on the arm of the man from Red Core.

"For our tussle? Yes!"

"I want to show you the bonanza first."

And Tornado picked up a torch and led the way down the corridor.

"Tornado and I are going to 'tend to a bit o' private business," whispered Injun Jack to Olive. "You must not interfere; neither must that boy. Don't let the result bother you for a minute, for since we have found the prize, Injun Jack is not goin' to pass in his checks at this stage of the game. Count on that, my Gold Princess."

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW EVERYTHING PANNED OUT.

FACE to face in the cooling shade of the mountain-side, the two men stood once more.

Tawny and strong like savage gladiators they eyed each other, while their breasts heaved like the tumultuous ocean.

In the right hand of each was a formidable bowie, ready to decide the duel.

Now that the gold mine had been found, and the Gray Hoods exterminated, they were going to fight for the prize.

If Tornado won, then not an ounce of the glittering prize should fall to the Queen of Red Core; if he lost, the boy hero would be thrust aside without his share.

The men stood ten feet apart glaring at each other like the tigers of the arena.

"Ready! Advance!" fell suddenly from Indian Jack's tongue, and the duelists stepped forward.

When toe struck toe, they halted, and with knives ready waited for the final signal.

Old Tornado was eager for the combat; his eyes fairly blazed when he saw the command forming on Injun Jack's lips.

Another second and they would make a dash at each other's heart.

All at once a stone that glittered strangely as it passed through the sunlight fell at their feet.

The next moment the figure of Tornado Jr. bounded into view.

"Hold back your knives, for heaven's sake! The boss bonanza is a fraud! Don't kill each other for a lot of worthless rocks!"

The men lowered their dirks with exclamations of disgust; their toes parted company.

"I can't b'lieve that!" exclaimed Tom, and the next second he was holding in his hand the stone which had fallen at their feet.

"Look fur yerself, Injun!" he said, handing the rock to his antagonist. "Ef that is the kind ov dirt we've fought, hated, an' lied fur them I'm disgusted with all mankind."

By this time Tornado Jr. had come up. He was holding forth several rocks that bore resemblance to the one Injun Jack was examining.

"Here is our gold, Tornado," he said with a light laugh. "A ton of it wouldn't buy a decent breakfast in Omaha. Would it Jack?"

The man from Red Core had cast the false nugget on the ground with a savage oath.

"Old Shady fooled us out here. Where is the old liar?" he cried.

"Whar I left 'im the other night," answered Tornado.

Injun Jack saw the full meaning of Tornado's answer, and the next moment he had flung his bowie to the earth.

"What! ain't you goin' to fight?" exclaimed Tornado.

"For a lot of sham gold? No!"

"You've got to take suthin' from old Tornado, an' hyar it is!"

Injun Jack had partly turned, but he looked around.

Another bowie quivered beside his blade in the ground, and Tornado Tom stood before him with outstretched hand.

The next moment two hands met and Tornado Tom exclaimed:

"By the jumping jingo! Injun, we'll carry the profits ov this expedition to the States in our rifle tubes. But mebbe we kin scrape suthin' solid out ov the boss bonanza for the young pair."

"Not out of such rocks as that," said Injun Jack, spurning the deceptive nugget with his foot. "But we'll try a place I saw in the mountains."

"I know whar it is."

"You?"

"Wal, yes, an' ef my eyes didn't deceive me we'll find enough thar to give the young 'uns a good squar' send-off at housekeepin'."

Injun Jack's eyes flashed.

"Oh, thar's no use in kickin' ag'in' what's bound to be," continued Tornado. "I wanted to act the hog with the bonanza, an' so did you; but now thet the youngsters ar' on an ekal footin', I say thet I'm ready to help 'em ekally along. They've seen each other, an' neither you or me, Injun, kin sp'ile the match. An' ef they take to one another, I won't shed a tear over the bonanza thet didn't pan out."

Injun Jack did not reply; but the next day a little company of four persons passed out of Red Core, and turned their faces toward the Bitter Root Mountains.

The old mine with its metal so deceptive, yet so nearly like gold, had been left behind, and the hope of a better "find" among the mountains urged the adventurers on.

The reader would have supposed that the last hunt had proved successful, if he could have attended the wedding that lately took place at number one thousand and one Sunlight avenue, in one of our largest cities.

The couple, or the "high contracting parties," as the papers of the day said, were young, stylish and handsome, and one wedding guest said to another after he had kissed the bride:

"That lost bonanza didn't pan out so bad after all. It yielded two precious nuggets, Tornado. I'd go through the hull th'ing ag'in jest to get to stand here and kiss the Queen of Red Core, as the bride of the boy."

"Yoo kin bet yer boots on thet, Injun. By jingo! I believe the bride's lookin' fur me to kiss 'er, and I hevn't kissed a woman fur twentyyear!"

But Tornado Tom passed the ordeal bravely.

THE END.

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